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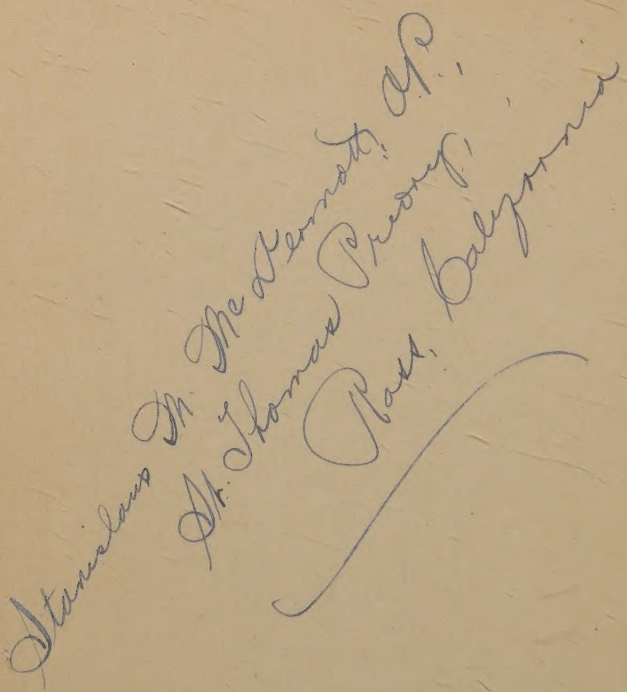

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RETREAT MATTER FOR PRIESTS

BY THE

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FOREWORD

The writings of the V. Rev. Paul Stiegele were published after his death (February 23, 1893) by the Rt. Rev. Msgr. B. Rieg, at the urgent request of that celebrated author and pulpit orator, Dr. Paul William von Keppler, Bishop of Rottenburg, to whose diocese the deceased prelate had belonged, and of many priests. In presenting this adaptation to the English-speaking clergy it was deemed expedient to change the original title, which is, *Exerzitienvorträge für Priester.*[1] A cursory perusal of the contents will reveal the fact that this work is eminently suitable to all priests, and not only to such as give clerical retreats, for it contains splendid matter for meditation and spiritual reading, nay even for sermons. I trust my confratres may find this authorized adaptation as useful and stimulating as I and many other priests have found the original.

THE TRANSLATOR

St. Lawrence, Wis., Feast of St. Joachim, 1925.

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Retreat Matter for Priests

FIRST SERIES

FIRST MEDITATION

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS—THE PRIEST'S SALVATION

WHO of us does not like to keep his priestly alb snow-white? And should not every speck of dust that may have settled on our chalice or paten, be wiped away?

We priests are the living, golden chalices of the sanctuary. These chalices, however, have for some time been exposed to the dust of the world; our alb has stains that are disagreeably apparent to ourselves, and perhaps also to others, and you have come here to restore to all these things the lustre they should have and should hereafter retain. This morning at Tierce you said: *"Cogitavi vias meas et converti pedes meos in testimonia tua"* (Ps. CXVIII, 59). You have seized the staff and turned your feet unto the testimonies of the Lord. Your priestly soul shall for a few days harken to the ordinances of the Lord. Your soul, that immortal spirit created by God, and related to Him, your soul, the spouse of light and truth, shall

once again soar to those regions for which it was created; shall for a few days hide, as it were, in a mysterious cloud, in order to descend again to the level of earth and resume the burden of your holy vocation as long as it may please God.

Can there be one among us who does not regard this retreat as a favor and a grace from above?

Who of us is not tired of everyday worries and crosses? Who would not gladly breathe for a few days the air of a higher altitude? Who of us in his account with God has no deficit which he would like to wipe out before the signal for the big voyage rings in his ears? Who does not need a word of comfort and encouragement, to accompany him upon his return to his daily routine? Who does not stand in need of new graces that will swell the drooping sails like a fresh breeze? And who, after having preached to others year in and year out, would not once again like to have himself preached to, to pray, recite the Holy Office, and meditate in common with his brother priests? Once again feel more strongly the solidarity by which we all form one phalanx fighting for the same cause on the same battle front?

All this God is ready to grant us through these holy exercises. Once more He is about to descend into our souls with the light of His eternal truths, with the gentle rain of His graces and consolations, to inspire us with songs of Zion in this land of exile.

Of course, we all understand that these holy hours impose upon us certain obligations. We must strive to make the retreat in the right spirit, with proper

quietude and calm of soul. When Samuel heard the voice of the Lord near the sanctuary, it was in the stillness of night (1 Kings, III); when Nicodemus heard our Lord speak those solemn, deeply penetrating words (John III, 2), it occurred in profound stillness and the words of life sank into his heart softly as the morning dew. So let it be with us! During this retreat God wishes us to shut out the noise of the market place. Hence we should observe both interior and exterior silence. A retreat without silence is likely to be unprofitable.

Besides keeping silence, let us conscientiously perform the prescribed exercises. When the priest, who on other occasions is "a master in Israel" (John III, 10), again becomes a pupil, when he who is ordinarily entitled to lead in prayer, submits to the rule of common prayer and community life, he performs an act of humility and obedience which cannot but bring him blessings. *Humilis* and *docilis* indicate the two principal virtues of superiors, and you will have ample opportunity to exercise them both during this retreat.

May the Holy Ghost assist us! Without Him we cannot even say: "Abba, Father" (Gal. IV, 6),—much less make a retreat. Of ourselves we are dry and unproductive, but He is the *fons vivus;* we are cold, He is the *ignis et caritas.* Whenever God instructs, He instructs *S. Spiritûs illustratione.* May He, then, through His Holy Spirit, grant us the fruits of this retreat! May He permit us to taste and relish the truth,—*recta sapere,*— give us peace and joy of heart, —*gaudere,*—and allow us *de consolatione eius semper*

gaudere! Light for the spirit, solace and peace for the heart,—this we may expect from the Holy Ghost during these coming days, through Christ our Lord.

Now let us begin the first meditation. There are words whose sound affects us deeply, words that entail a chain of thoughts and emotions. At the outset I will utter one of these mighty, significant words that no one can listen to with indifference. It is *salvation —our salvation.* That he should provide for the salvation of his own soul seems a matter of course for a man entrusted with the *cura animarum* and who is, therefore, a specialist in matters of salvation. Yet this self-evident truth is apt to be lost sight of, and we know that for us priests it is very good, yes, necessary, to be impressively reminded from time to time of the necessity of saving our own soul. St. Paul did this for his holy and well-beloved disciples Timothy and Titus (1 Tim. IV, 12 ff., VI, 11 ff.; 2 Tim. II, 1 ff.; Tit. II, 7 ff.). May this first meditation forcibly remind us of:

I. The motives for working out our salvation;

II. The obstacles we have to overcome in saving our souls.

I. *The Motives for Working out Our Salvation*

Our salvation consists in possessing God, by grace here below, in glory hereafter. *"Salus tuus ego sum,"* He proclaimed in the Old Testament (Ps. XXXIV, 3).

1. This our salvation we should work out, first of all *because God wills it.*

(a) God has given us an indescribably sublime destiny, namely, to save our souls. He has not left us in doubt about it. He has reached into our lives mightily and taken complete possession of us. First, by the fact of *creation.* We have no recollection of the moment when we entered this world, but it was for us a moment of immeasurable importance. My existence for time and eternity started with the creative act by which God brought forth my soul out of nothing and infused it into my body. From that moment I began to belong to God in an altogether inexpressible manner, more truly than the tree belongs to its owner, or the flower to the gardener.

Some time afterward there came another creative moment. At *Baptism* my Creator took possession of me in a new manner by impressing upon me an undying mark of His ownership,—a seal that will shine before angels and men through all eternity. Since then I belong to Him,—not only in a natural, but also in a supernatural manner.

After Baptism there came many more days, good and bad, bright and dark. The hand upon the clock of life advanced, and finally another great hour struck, when the immeasurable God touched me mysteriously with a Sacrament by which He burnt into my soul a new and more glorious seal of His dominion, which blazes even more brightly,—namely, the *"character indelebilis"* of the priesthood, "which the holy

Angels envy us."[1] In the sevenfold fiery stream of *Holy Orders* my soul was fused and amalgamated with God. He took possession of my body by celibacy, of my mind and will by the everlasting obligation of prayer, by chaining me to the service of the altar. He took possession of my affections, talents, faculties, of all the years of my life, by the never-ending obligations of the clerical state. He placed His sign-manual upon me:—the tonsure on my head, the anointment on my hands, the clerical garb on my body. Who else is so manifoldly signed before God and man as the priest, whose soul and body belong to God by many titles? Does not everything about us, within and without, from head to foot, unceasingly cry out: *"Tuus sum ego"* (Ps. CXVIII, 94)? To Thee I belong, O God, and to no one else, to no man, to no woman, yes, not even to myself!

(b) It is, therefore, an overwhelming fact that I have been completely taken possession of and claimed by God Almighty. For what purpose? To serve Him. *"Dei servitio mancipatum esse,"* dedicated to the service of God, as the ordination rite for subdeaconship used to put it,[2] that is God's purpose with me for this life. But His ultimate purpose goes far beyond the earth. He took hold of me in creation, in Baptism, in Holy Orders, to make me *eternally happy* by sharing His life, His wisdom, His love, His bliss. *"Vita beata animae Deus."* As everything that God

[1] Provincial Council of Rheims, 1857 (Cap. XII, *De Dignitate et Auctoritate Episcoporum; Collect. Lacens.,* IV, 234).

[2] Cfr. *Pontif. Rom.*

does is marked by grandeur and majesty, so also the destiny which He has assigned to us. That destiny is not happiness in the ordinary sense of the word,—a happiness which we can visualize with the aid of our imagination; no, it is an entirely different kind of happiness, an indescribably lofty and profound grandeur, *pondus gloriae,* as the Apostle says (2 Cor. IV, 17), a happiness whose weight will let us sink ever deeper into the joyous abyss of the beatific vision of God, His immensity, His love, eternal bliss. Words cannot adequately describe what He has prepared for us. *"Oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis intravit"* (1 Cor. II, 9).

(c) This, then, is what is meant by the proposition: God wills our salvation. This is the path which He has marked out for us. Its beginning here on earth is insignificant; but it grows in light, until in the next life it reaches the full height of midday, beneath a sun that glows eternally over our head. What a weighty motive for working out our salvation is the thought that God wills it! He, whose wisdom cannot err, whose will is steeped in beauty, goodness, and sanctity,—He wills my salvation. He tells me this in *words.* Read those wonderful, ofttimes burning words in Sacred Scripture, from Genesis to Apocalypse, in which He gives human expression to His wish for our salvation. He manifests this wish also in *deeds,*—by the Incarnation, the Cross, the Holy Eucharist, by all the institutions founded for our salvation, by all the *magnalia* and *mirabilia* of the history of

Revelation and of the Church. It was a great hour for humanity when thousands stood around a preacher who in burning words urged them to free the Holy Land from infidels. At last the fire glowed in every heart, and the masses roared, *"Deus lo vult, God wills it!"* The nations of Christendom took up the cry and a great army set out for Palestine. There is another holy land, which the Saviour would fain call His own, which bears the loveliest marks of His hands,—a land which He has blessed innumerable times, has often,—even this very morning,—irrigated with his Blood. That land is your soul. It, too, must be freed, it, too, must be saved! *"Deus lo vult!"*

2. But it is not God alone that wills my salvation, *I, too, will it,* I *must* will it if I am wise and wish to be happy.

(a) We all desire to be *wise.* The reproach of folly is not relished by anyone, least of all by the priest. Now there is but one true wisdom, even in this twentieth century, and that is to work out one's eternal salvation, and but one essential folly, namely, to lose one's soul. All knowledge that leads men away from God is sheer folly. The devil surely possesses more knowledge than all the learned men of the earth combined, yet he has not a grain of true wisdom, because he is infinitely far removed from essential Wisdom, which is God. Thus I, too, shall be a fool if I lose God. If I am wise I will often repeat those monumental words which the eternal Wisdom of God, walking among us, once uttered: "What doth it profit a

man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul!" (Matth. XVI, 26). Of what use to a priest are refinement and culture of the intellect, a good parish, a prominent position, or even a bishop's mitre, or the red hat of a cardinal, nay, the papal tiara itself, if he lose his own soul? The folly would be even greater if I were to lose my soul, not for the whole world, but for a mere trifle, an empty honor, a moment of carnal pleasure or a bit of comfort! Many a priest, though shrewd in other things, is surpassed in practical wisdom by simple layfolk! If I am wise, I will be so first of all in regard to myself, and not only in regard to others (Prov. IX, 12). I will not only teach others to save their souls as the *unum necessarium* (Luke X, 42); I will not be so foolish as to stand for twenty, thirty, forty years like a signpost on the way to eternity, directing others heavenward, but myself remaining stationary (St. Augustine [3]), until at last the inscription is effaced and the whole thing tumbles in a heap. I will not be like a bell that calls men to God, but itself remains outside, until one day it cracks and becomes useless. Were I to act thus, verily I should be *stultissimus virorum* (Prov. XXX, 2), a bungler, an ignoramus in the *business* (*negotium*, the Apostle calls it) of salvation (1 Thess. IV, 11).

(b) I not only want to be wise, but also *happy*. I know what happiness awaits me in a few decades,

[3] "*Facti sunt* [*scribae*] *eis* [*magis*] *tanquam lapides ad miliaria: viatoribus aliquid ostendunt, sed ipsi stolidi atque immobiles remanserunt.*" *Serm.*, 199, c. 2 (*al. De Temp.*, 34; Migne, *P. L.*, 38, 1027).

perhaps a few years,—a happiness that cannot be depicted with colors of this world. My whole soul is centered upon this everlasting happiness, because the short dream of joy which this world offers, cannot satisfy me. How often do I strike the bars of my prison with the pinions of my soul, as it were, because I would fain escape upward into purer air and greater freedom. Oh, the happiness, the bliss that smiles upon me, oh, the crown that beckons me! I cannot but yearn for the heaven of the priest.

I must will that which God wills, that for which He has created and destined me, if I wish to be wise and happy. Hence my motto shall be: *"Uni una,"* to the one God my only soul![4] By all means and always I will tend towards Him, my Creator and my goal, or, as the saintly Curé of Ars used to say: "On towards God like a cannon ball."

II. *The Obstacles That Have to be Overcome*

Upon this straight path of love towards God we meet many impediments. Alas, we know these impediments only too well, for the interior history of our soul is full of them.

1. There is first and foremost our *fallen, corrupt human nature,* which even ordination did not lift from us. It is the *"lex in membris repugnans legi mentis"* (Rom. VII, 23); it is the *"fomes ad agonem relictus,"* which *"ex peccato est et ad peccatum inclinat"* (*Conc.*

[4] This phrase is attributed to Bl. Eligius, a companion of St. Francis of Assisi.

Trid., Sess. V, *De Pecc. Orig.*); it is the "glowing coal within," which we "cannot cast out" (St. Chrysostom).[5] These impediments render the business of saving our soul very laborious. Our progress is like that of a man walking on a slippery path, upon which he is apt to fall at any moment. *"Qui se existimat stare, videat ne cadat"* (1 Cor. X, 12). Then there are the enemies from without—chief among them the *world* with its allurements, especially the present-day world with its deceptive principles and seductive wiles, which are temptingly unfolded also before the soul of the priest. Finally, the big, cunning, tireless *enemy* (*adversarius*), whose choicest morsel, as St. Jerome[6] says, is the priest. Is it strange that Sacred Scripture and the Saints, who were so sagacious in this respect, often speak of the devil and his subtle snares (*fraudes diabolicae*)? If you looked more intently at your past life, you would doubtless discover many footprints of the "prowling lion" (1 Pet. V, 8).

2. Another impediment may arise from *too much exterior work and too many occupations.* Now-a-days men, including the clergy, do not live as quietly as they used to. Owing to the constant pressure of visitors and business, the extraordinary expedients of pastoration, such as societies, etc., which must be given con-

[5] *De Virginit.*, c. 34; Montfauc. (ed. Paris., 1834 ff.), I, 358.

[6] *"Ut . . . principes eius [Ecclesiae] capiantur retibus diaboli: qui non sit unius regis captione contentus, sed quotidie reges et principes capere festinet, secundum illud, quod scriptum est: Escae eius electae."* (Habac. I, 16). (*Hier. in Ezech.*, c. 19, v. 14.)

stant attention, the priest, too, is apt to be drawn into the whirlpool of exterior life and exposed to the danger of having his own soul impoverished, because the fountain of interior life becomes exhausted and there is so little to replenish it. This outward activity is necessary in our days, and the busy pastor rightly receives praise and recognition for his zeal and his efforts to promote every good cause. But the more our activity extends outward, the more brilliant is its external aspect, the greater must be our solicitude lest the inward fountain of life dry up imperceptibly. One may be outwardly productive, as Lia was, but too blear-eyed (Gen. XXIX, 17) to see the things of God. Both exterior labor and interior life must, therefore, go hand in hand.[7] *"Sic in propria sollicitudine ferveant,"* says St. Gregory the Great,[8] *"ut a commissorum custodia minime torpescant."*[9] Let us not be like nations that have established colonies, to which they send money, men and means, but from which they get nothing in return. You, dear Fathers, set out daily for your colonies, which claim every hour of your time, every ounce of your strength; but when you return home, perhaps there is nothing left for your own soul! Alas, if the fountains of internal grace flow from a hundred springs, but the priest has no time to drink therefrom! Alas, if round about life's bark the winds of Heaven

[7] *"Ille* [*praedicator*] *ad perfectionis culmen erigitur, qui non activa solummodo, sed etiam contemplativa vita solidatur."* (Greg. M., *Moral.*, l. XXXI, c. 12).

[8] *Lib. Past.*, III, 4.

[9] *Ib.*, I, 4.

blow in Mass, Office, and meditation, but you have no sails to catch them!

3. If the impediments were not so great and manifold, the business of salvation could not be called *"saving"* one's soul. The word "save" connotes danger and that energy is required to avert it. The work of saving lives or property at a fire, for example, implies eagerness, haste, nay, often reckless bravery. Do not these words also describe the manner in which the priest must save his soul from out of the Sodom of this world? Must he not proceed eagerly, hastily, diligently, without looking back? Or, in the case of shipwreck,—how much energy is required to save one's life? What a hasty grasping of the saving plank, what a ceaseless struggle against the waves, what a diligent pressing for the shore? If, then, we wish to save our precious souls from the almost universal shipwreck of the world, shall we succeed if our efforts are listless? Do we not regard this urgent and terribly serious work altogether too lightly? Do we heed the command: *"Contendite intrare!"* (Luke XIII, 24)? Do we "force ourselves through the narrow gate"? Ask yourself: Is the care of my soul really my foremost, nay, my only care,—*iam non prima, sed sola?* Is the idea of saving my soul really a passion, in the good sense of the term, which makes everything subservient to itself, actuates my whole life, and constantly spurs me on to fresh efforts? If we were entirely truthful, should we not have to admit

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that our zeal for the salvation of our own souls could and should be much greater and more effective than it is? Perhaps during these holy exercises the thought may flash upon you: "It will not do to continue as in the past; I must set to work more earnestly!" Perhaps the plaintive cry will rise heavenward: *"Vivifica me secundum verbum tuum!"* (Ps. CXVIII, 25). I must live, I must breathe, or I shall suffocate and perish. *"Domine, salva nos, perimus!"* (Matth. VIII, 25). May the quickening Spirit of God infuse new energy into our drooping souls, in order that we may again resolve fervently: "I will save my soul; it belongs to God; I will save it for Him and for me!"

SECOND MEDITATION

THE PRIEST AND MORTAL SIN

I. *What is Mortal Sin when Committed by a Priest?*

EVERY one of us has at one time or another explained mortal sin to the people; hence I can refer you for a definition to your manuscripts at home, to your utterances in the pulpit, and to your exhortations in the confessional. Hundreds and thousands know what we think of mortal sin: that it is a complete turning away from the Supreme Good towards the creature. We call it the most hateful, the blackest thing there is, the deepest wound we can inflict upon ourselves. This or something similar we have often proclaimed with full conviction. Some of our hearers, perhaps, shuddered when we conjured up the *mysterium iniquitatis* (2 Thess. II, 7) like a portentous image from the depths. Let us gather up as into a focus all the awful light which we are wont to shed upon mortal sin before the faithful, and let it play upon this monster of the moral world, for our own admonition and warning. For us, there is an additional consideration which we do not mention before laymen. We must deal with mortal sin not merely as such, but as committed by the priest,—a phenomenon incomprehensible to many lay-

men. We take for granted what may be said of mortal sin as such, and will consider only the circumstances that lend a peculiar odiousness to the mortal sin of the priest.

1. Mortal sin, when committed by a priest, is characterized by greater *malice*. Often it is not a sin of weakness or ignorance, but a deliberate turning away of the will from the clearly understood law of God. That law has been deeply impressed upon the mind of the priest, and he has learned to distinguish mortal from venial sins. The divine precepts and the duties of his state of life are written before his eyes as inescapably as the monster placards in our large cities, which the eye cannot possibly overlook. The priest has read all that pertains to sin innumerable times, he knows it fairly by heart, and yet,—in this frame of mind and in this clear light of conscience, he sins! Mortal sin, when committed by a priest, is, therefore, far less pardonable than when committed by others; for it has the malice of one who knows precisely that God is our Supreme Good, what sanctifying grace is worth and deliberately casts it aside. *"Profunde peccaverunt,"* we read in Osee IX, 9 of the Israelites. The priest, too, may be said to "sin deeply" when he commits a mortal sin.

2. Mortal sin, when committed by a priest, is extremely *degrading*. True, every Christian disgraces himself unspeakably by mortal sin, but no one so much as the priest. "Whosoever committeth sin is the serv-

ant of sin," we are told in Holy Writ (John VIII, 34); how much more the priest whom the Lord hath exalted, *"ut collocet eum cum principibus"* (Ps. CXII, 8), when he becomes a *servus peccati,* or, to use an expression of St. Ambrose,[1] *"propter peccati pretium deductus in captivitatis aerumnam."* History affords an instance of extreme degradation in the case of the vanquished Emperor Valerian, when the Persian king Sapor set his foot upon his neck. But who can enumerate all the revolting instances through the centuries where the barbarian of the nether world, the devil, sets his foot upon a neck whose head was adorned with the crown of the priesthood? Here, too, it may be said (Is. LI, 23): *"Incurvare, ut transeamus."* The demons say to him: "Bow down, wince, prostrate thyself, so that we can walk over thee!" When such an unfortunate priest, *e. g.,* one who is enmeshed in the lusts of the flesh, recites his Breviary and comes to the passage: *"Homo, cum in honore esset, non intellexit"* (Ps. XLVIII, 21), what a gruesome portrait he paints of himself! Who is more a *homo in honore* than the consecrated "man of God" (1 Tim. VI, 11), and behold, what does he say of himself? *"Similis factus est iumentis insipientibus"* (Ps. XLVIII, 13). He resembles, not the nobler animals, but the beasts of burden that gaze mutely upon the ground. Can the dehumanizing effect of mortal sin be more graphically described? "There is nothing," adds St. Ambrose to the words quoted above, "there is nothing so extremely

[1] *De Poenit.,* l. II, c. 11; Migne, *P. L.* (ed. Paris., 1866) 16, 543 f.

painful to one who is reduced to the slavery of sin, as the recollection of the height from which he has fallen."

3. Mortal sin on the part of the priest spells the blackest kind of *ingratitude*. Isaias in his first chapter brands the ingratitude of the children of Israel in these acrid words: "Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth! I have brought up children and exalted them: but they have despised Me!" (I, 2). With how much greater force do not these words apply to the son of the New Testament, *i. e.,* the sinful priest, who has "gone away backwards from the Holy One of Israel" (I, 4). *"Filios enutrivi":* who is more a *"son"* than the priest, fashioned after the Son of God by the *character indelebilis* in Holy Orders? This son God has exalted (*"exaltavi"*), raised from nothing to being, from being to Baptism, from Baptism to Holy Orders; seven steps He erected for him, upon which to ascend, each higher, more splendid, and more beautiful than the others. How much did it cost, what an overflow of grace was required, how many had to lend their aid, exert themselves, make sacrifices, pray, until he was raised to the priesthood! *"Filios exaltavi!" "Et enutrivi":* the nourishment of doctrine, of grace, the Holy Eucharist I have daily prepared for them in the fire of the Holy Ghost! "Sons I have nourished and exalted," *"ipsi autem spreverunt me,"*—but they have despised Me. What a strange, dreadful, unexpected "but" this is! Might not the Lord cry out to such a priest as he did in the Old Testament: "I have enough"? (Is. I, 11). Is not the ingratitude of the

priest who commits mortal sin literally overflowing? *"Profunde peccaverunt."*

II. *Whither does Mortal Sin Lead in a Priest?*

1. The consequences of mortal sin are apparent first of all in the priest's interior life. There is an awful rupture. Sin completely destroys the harmony of his interior life and renders inconsistent all that he does and says. When standing at the *altar* he utters the most sacred words, full of love and devotion to the Saviour, all his actions express the deepest piety, —while in fact his soul is an *anima adultera,* fully conscious of her spiritual unfaithfulness. In his *Breviary,* throughout the 118th Psalm recited for the little hours, he again and again avows, in every possible variation, his attachment to and his love for the precepts of the Lord; at lauds and vespers he proclaims the sovereign rights of God over all creatures, the profundity of His perfections,—in short, while saying his Breviary he professes beliefs, sentiments, a devotion to God and a magnanimity towards Him that a Seraph in Heaven need not be ashamed of;—but what hast thou done, and what art thou still doing, thou man of the double tongue? Honey flows from thy mouth, but gall is in thy heart. *"Mel in ore, fel in corde, verba lactis, fraus in factis."* Whilst preaching and administering the Holy Sacraments such a faithless priest reaches down into the treasury of God to distribute jewels to others, while for himself he flings them in the dirt. What priestly heart could feel right amid such dreadful con-

tradictions? Many a sinful priest lives in a sort of *inward hell,* not of punishment, but of guilt, as ascetic writers say,—an inward hell on earth, without peace, without light. This hell, like the one in the world beyond, has a worm that gnaws and a fire that burns, and it either drives such a priest into gloomy retirement, or causes him to engage in all sorts of occupations, giving rise to an eternal unrest that compels him to seek escape from himself in social gatherings, excursions, travels or even the deadening fumes of alcohol!

Sometimes mortal sin superinduces an uncanny *calm* and *insensibility* which is even worse than the unrest we have just described. The guilty priest no longer sees or feels anything. A condition of total blindness sets in in his soul. The sun of truth and the light of heaven still shine above him, eternity still beckons from afar; but he sees nothing; the dread film that has been drawn over his eyes veils everything, ofttimes unto death. The holy Fathers (*e. g.,* St. Jerome and St. John Chrysostom) speak of blindness and obduracy as frightful symptoms of the disease that affects the sinful priest.

2. Thus sin makes a priest thoroughly wretched; indeed, no man is more wretched, more unhappy, poorer than he. However, it affects not him alone, but *others* with him. Mortal sin in a priest is like a heavy stone that falls into the water: the circles which it draws run on and on, until the whirlpool of sin swallows not only the priest, but often drags other souls down into the yawning abyss. Even if his sins

remain unknown, they nevertheless injure many souls, because they render his pastoration fruitless. Salt that has lost its savor (Mark IX, 49) no longer seasons (St. Gregory the Great).[2] And when sooner or later his sins become known, then woe to souls! The images awakened in the hearts of men by the grievous sin of a priest are more infamous, the pestilential breath of that sin is far more penetrating, than any other. It disturbs the good, while wanton souls snap at it as a bait, blasé worldlings relish it like a rare *hautgout,* and the enemies of the Church and the hosts of hell rejoice over it. The worst misfortune that can befall a congregation is to have a bad pastor; instead of being to them a *dux ad vitam,* he is, as St. Gregory says (*ib.*), *auctor mortis.* How many blessings, even temporal, may not a single sacrilegious Mass prevent! What streams of grace may not be dried up by the sinful life of the spiritual father and guide! To this day I recall the sad impression I received one summer as I passed through the wine-growing districts of France and saw among verdant vineyards numberless others that were wilted and yellow in consequence of the ravages of the phylloxera. What a terrible sight would meet one's eyes if it were possible to journey through diocese after diocese and to behold, with the sharpened vision of an angel, as it were, the ravages caused in many a spiritual vineyard by the phylloxera of a sinful

[2] *"Quid animas hominum nisi cibum Domini dixerimus, quae ad hoc sunt conditae, ut . . . in aeternae Ecclesiae augmentum tendant . . . Si igitur cibus Dei est populus, condimentum cibi sacerdotes esse debuerunt. Sed quia sal infatuatum est, condiri non valet cibus Dei."* (*Homil. in Evangel.,* 17).

clergy? Unfortunately the Church history of all ages tells of such mischief. Sometimes the state of such a devastated spiritual vineyard, even after the lapse of many decades, proclaims what happened to it, until at length a new spiritual planter rebuilds it with much toil. It is easy to understand why many holy souls must endure frightful sufferings to counteract the effects of such wounds inflicted on the body of the Church by bad priests.

This much is certain, mortal sin committed by a priest is an element of corruption endangering everything with which it comes into contact. Woe to the sinful priest himself, and woe to all whom he drags along with him on his ride of death!

III. *How Does a Priest Fall into Mortal Sin?*

1. How is it possible that a priest should fall so miserably from those luminous heights to which Holy Orders elevated him, down into the sewer of mortal sin?

We will here consider only *one* of the chief causes of this calamity. Too often our sins plainly bear the mark of their parentage. A great number bear the stamp of a man's *ruling passion.*[3]

(a) The *passio dominans* attacks everyone, even the most virtuous. It attacked the Apostles,—Peter, Thomas, Judas. It has worked untold mischief in the

[3] Cfr. Bellecius, *Virtutis Solidae Impedimenta,* P. I, c. 4, p. 152 ff., Ratisbonae, 1755.

history of mankind (Cain, David, Solomon, Jezabel, Herod). Ecclesiastical and profane history are full of its ravages. There is no mortal man whom some evil passion (*prava affectio*) does not dominate, or seek to dominate.

(b) In its incipient stages such a passion appears quite harmless. It is clothed in the garb of an angel of light and pretends to be our best friend. But woe to us if we fail to oppose it! As it develops, it takes possession of the soul, gives tone and color to our whole life, and finally grows to be a mysterious power which introduces system, logic, and consistency into our sinful conduct, and in the end completely destroys virtue and the spiritual life. Among the other vices the dominant passion swims on top and tries to make everything else subservient to it. It is the exuberant soil into which the devil and the world scatter the seeds of mortal sin. To learn to know our ruling passion is more important than many other things in life.

2. We have endeavored, in our first point, to explain what mortal sin means in the life of a priest. In our second point we have seen its blighting effects, and in the third we have searched for its hiding places, whence it sallies and draws its provisions, and which we must stop up so as to starve the monster along with its brood. But why this distressing and humiliating meditation on the sin of the priest?

(a) Happy the priest whom this meditation does not concern! But let us, at least, take a look at the

sins of others that they may serve us as a warning. Hear what St. Jerome says: "Great is the dignity of priests, but greater is their ruin if they sin. Let us rejoice at our elevation [to the priesthood], but let us dread our downfall. The joy at having occupied an exalted station is not so great as the sorrow over having fallen from that lofty height." [4] Does not the admonition of the Apostle (Philipp. II, 12) apply also to us priests— "Work your salvation with fear and trembling"?

(b) There is a specific distinction between mortal and venial sin, and ten or a hundred *peccata venialia* do not by themselves constitute one *peccatum letale*. Still it remains true what the Angelic Doctor says (*Summa Th.*, 2a 2ae, qu. 43, a. 7, ad 5; cfr. 1a 2ae, qu. 88, a. 3): "Although venial sin does not take away grace, by which man attains salvation, yet, in as much as venial sin *disposes* to mortal sin, it is detrimental." Unless we earnestly, consistently, and as a matter of principle combat venial sin, no solid virtue can thrive in the soul, and we cannot be secure against mortal sin. "It is a matter of precaution," St. Jerome writes, " to shun little sins lest we fall into mortal sin. We shall avoid a fault so much more easily, the more we fear it; neither will he quickly proceed to greater sins who is afraid of the small ones." [5]

[4] *"Grandis dignitas sacerdotum, sed grandis ruina eorum, si peccant. Lactemur ad ascensum, sed timeamus ad lapsum. Non est tanti gaudii excelsa tenuisse, quanti moeroris de sublimioribus corruisse."* (*Hom. in Ezech.*, c. 44, v. 29).

[5] *Ep.* 14, *ad Celantiam*, 1.

(c) At a retreat we are supposed to review our whole life and to survey the faults we have committed. In doing so, who of us is not inclined to strike his breast and cry out: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke XVIII, 13). Let us not imitate the manner of worldlings, who complain of everything else rather than of their sins. They deplore their bodily ills and sicknesses, their labors and hardships, the difficulties of their station in life, etc., but their deepest misery, sin, they hardly feel at all. And yet St. James (III, 2) bears witness that "in many things we all offend," and St. John says twice in the same chapter (1 John I, 8. 10): "If we say we have not sin, the truth is not in us." The Church tries hard to keep the consciousness of our sins alive in us. What sonorous words does she not put on our lips every morning at the Offertory, when we stand before His Divine Majesty, with the Host before us, and confess our *"innumerabilia peccata et offensiones et negligentias!"* Yesterday we laid them on the paten, and to-day a new lot of "sins, offenses, and negligences" stands before us. Our knowledge and our virtue, perhaps, have not advanced since yesterday, but the *peccata* and *offensiones* have shown a frightful fertility!

Let us inject into our confession before God a suitable affection of the heart. The Church desires this; she makes us bow down profoundly at the Confiteor: she bids us strike our breast at the *"Nobis quoque peccatoribus,"*—the only loud words in the Canon; she sends us her most soulful songs to declare our sins before God,—the seven Penitential Psalms. Oh, let

us recite the *Miserere* devoutly every day during this retreat! *"Iniquitatem meam ego cognosco,"* I recognize my sinfulness, I admit it; nothing shall conceal it from me, no excuse, no disguise. *"Et peccatum meum contra me est semper"* (Ps. L, 3). *Peccatum meum,* my sin, not the sins of others, not the faults of my neighbors, which are so apt to divert my gaze from my own; but my own sin *contra me est;* it stands before me with its misshapen features, its disfigured countenance. *Semper,* in the morning of sacerdotal life and in the evening, it is fastened within me like an arrow (Ps. XXXVII, 3; Job VI, 4), *contra me est.*

But with the Psalmist I will turn to God and ask Him: *"Convertere, Domine,"* turn to me, O Lord, full of mercy and grace; *"et eripe animam meam,"* lead forth my soul, or, if necessary, "tear it out" of the depths of sin and disorder; *"et salvum me fac,"* I long to be "made whole," I desire to be thoroughly cured for the rest of my life,—therefore, *"salvum me fac, propter misericordiam tuam!"* (Ps. VI, 5.) Yes, "for Thy mercy's sake." I will intone this glorious, inexhaustible hymn of mercy often during this retreat, and amidst its consoling strains I will allow myself to be conducted to the sacred Tribunal of Penance.

THIRD MEDITATION

DE INFERNO SACERDOTIS

SINCE it is the purpose of a retreat to set before us once again the way of life and of death (Jer. XXI, 8), we must not pass over in silence the final terminus of a sinful life, *i. e.*, hell.

There are various descriptions of hell to be found in the writings of theologians, in the private revelations of the Saints, and in the meditations of ascetic writers. For our consideration to-day let us choose a guide that will lead us securely through those regions of terror in the other world, I mean, *Holy Scripture,* the inspired word of God. The torches which it sets up to illuminate for us the depths of hell, have been lighted by the Holy Ghost Himself.

Holy Scripture describes hell as a place of torments, *locus tormentorum* (Luke XVI, 28). It is *the* place of torments, as Heaven is *the* place of joy. Theologians usually divide these torments into two groups, which they call *poena damni* and *poena sensus.*

I. *Poena Damni*

What does Holy Scripture teach us regarding the *poena damni, i. e.,* the loss of the beatific vision?

1. The *poena damni* is expressed in the words of our Lord (Matth. XXV, 4): *"Depart from Me, ye cursed."* Imagine the situation in which these words will be spoken. The nations are assembled on the day of judgment. A vast throng, doomed to eternal death, stands to the left of the Judge, who solemnly pronounces the sentence prophesied 1900 years ago: *"Depart from Me!"* It is the pronouncement of an omnipotent God,—horrific and irresistible, beside which the cataclysms of the earth and the catastrophes of universal history are mere trifles. When a mass of rock starts sliding downward on a mountain side, what a terrific giving way and pushing aside of the rocky strata, what a fearful crash ensues! And when on the day of the Last Judgment the command "Depart from Me" resounds, when this mass of condemned beings begins to roll downward, what an unprecedented spectacle it will be for angels and men! What if in this rushing avalanche there should be the soul of a priest whirling into the infinite abyss! What if it should be *your* soul, hurled to eternal perdition, far, far away from God!

Yes, far away from God! For He says: "Depart from *Me!*" Therefore, the reprobate soul is separated from God. It is a separation, a tearing away, an expulsion of the soul from the only Being that affords stability and consolation, from the Sun of the spirit world, from the ever-gushing Fountain of life and happiness. In that hour the condemned sinner knows what God is, what He could and would be to him; his soul is drawn with tremendous force towards the

Highest Good; all his faculties seek Him, the Strong, the Living God (Ps. XLI, 3);—but, O horrors! he is hurled back by the ineluctable sentence that never fails of its effect: "Depart from Me!"

Bartholdi's famous statue of Liberty in New York harbor is equipped with a search-light that sends its dazzling rays far out into the night. Often birds are attracted through the darkness and eagerly approach the light, but flutter against the thick glass of the lantern, and lie about with broken wings. The human soul yearns for God far more intensely than a bird yearns for the light. Oh, how those souls will fly towards the only Light shining from afar in the night of eternity; how they will rush towards God with headlong speed! But before they reach Him, they will be repelled by the dread command: "Depart!" and they will tumble into the dismal abyss, crushed and broken! What a lamentable fate that of a priest cut off from God and Christ! Once he prayed in the holy place: *"Ne permittas me separari a te";* now he hears *"Discede a me"* ringing in his ears for all eternity. Once, at the altar, he was only one step removed from Christ, from his Divinity and His humanity; now there yawns between him and his Lord, who was so good to him, an unbridgeable abyss—*chaos magnum* (Luke XVI, 26). Once he was an *alter Christus;* now he is a *maledictus;*—cursed, not by God, but by his own acts. He loved the curse and it came upon him (Ps. CVIII, 18); he forcibly rammed the doors of hell and of his own free will hurled himself into the fiery pool.

2. The Gospel employs yet another simile. It compares damnation with *ejection from the marriage feast of the Son* (Matth. XXII). The Apocalypse (XIX, 7 ff.) draws an enchanting picture of the marriage of the Lamb and registers the cry: "Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" How must it feel to be banned from this assembly of the Blessed and the Saints, from the ranks of the holy Angels with their golden harps and their never-ceasing Alleluias! The soul of the priest, especially destined for these glorious things, ordained for the eternal liturgy before the throne of God, must hear the words: *"Foris canes,"* out with the dogs, the unchaste, and the murderers! (Apoc. XXII, 15).

Worse than that! The Saviour says: "Bind his hands and feet" (Matth. XXII, 13). This is the frightful captivity of hell. All corporal and spiritual aspirations and impulses towards happiness are bound and shackled; the soul is no longer able to make any effort towards salvation. Behold the priest,—once so active physically and spiritually, condemned to hell without a leave of absence! He despised the bonds of sacred discipline, of a regulated, orderly life; now, like the fallen angels, he is held down by the ropes of hell. "Having cast them down into the place of torments, He delivered them into the chains of hell to be tormented" (2 Pet. II, 4). Oh, how he would like to regain the liberty and the glory of the children of God; but the "chains of hell" are fastened upon him by divine justice and hold him in everlasting bondage (Jude. v, 6).

3. And he suffers in never-ending darkness (Jude v, 6). Again and again does Sacred Scripture mention this awful condition of "exterior darkness," as the Saviour calls it (Matth. XXII, 13). It is the extreme antithesis of God. "God is light;" and *"tenebrae in eo non sunt ullae"* (1 John I, 5). Once the priest was wont to say every day at Prime: *"Splendor Domini Dei nostri super nos."* Once he spent bright hours at the altar. Once a *nubes lucida* hovered over him and the Sacred Host at daily Mass. Now he is surrounded by impenetrable darkness! In Heaven the enchanting light of glory enraptures the soul of the blessed with the vision and love of God; and here,—oh, how shall I describe it?—here the *tenebrae exteriores* envelop him. He is far, far away from God, out where all light is extinguished. We have heard of the horrors of the long arctic night, when the sun does not shine for months, when heaven and earth reveal nothing but an endless, inscrutable calm, and silence rules like a frightful, unbearable spectre.[1] Here we have a terrestrial image of the eternal night of hell. The expected reappearance of the sun was almost the only topic of conversation among the occupants of a ship who wintered in the arctic ice, and when the sun came, they actually screamed for joy. The denizens of hell well know their absent Sun—God: they think of nothing else but Him; they wish for nothing but His light. Gladly would they wait a million years if

[1] "Upon the face of nature I have seen no expression so awful as the silence of the arctic night." (Lorinser, *Buch der Natur,* III, 628).

but one ray of that eternal Sun would appear on the distant horizon; but for them time and hope have ceased. In this arctic night of the world beyond, the darkness is literally permanent. It is a *procella tenebrarum* (Jude v, 13), which stirs up the souls of the damned like the fallen leaves, and never permits them to rest even for one moment. Exegetes try to explain this phrase, "storm of darkness." They say there is in hell an external darkness of place, an internal darkness of intellect, and so forth. Let us leave to the damned the secrets of their stormy night and cherish the hope that we may never experience it. Let us regard the reprobate priest, this fallen angel, and merely ask: "Why is he here?" Because, like the fallen angels, he did not keep "his principality" (Jude v, 6). He was, by ordination, a prince of the House of God, more precious than a regal diadem, but, *"non servavit suum principatum."* He was a prince endowed with a wealth of grace and gifts. Where is there a being here below so wrapped in divine love and so highly placed upon a throne as the priest? But the reprobate priest has resisted God's lavish grace and lost his principality.

4. We have, so far, considered the separation of the soul from God implied in the *poena damni.* This, however, is not an individual penalty in hell, but intensified by association with most intolerable companions. Our Divine Saviour on one occasion employed the similitude of fish that are picked over by the fisherman,—the good being selected for the market, whereas the bad are "cast forth" (*"malos foras mi-*

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serunt"; Matth. XIII, 48). What a frightful picture of hell is that heap of rotting fish! What a stench they create! Hell is the great cesspool of humanity, into which pours all filth from the primeval days to the 20th century,—a sewage that never subsides, but rises higher and higher. Imagine a priest in the midst of idolaters, perverts, harlots, murderers, etc., who have not inherited the kingdom of God! (1 Cor. VI, 9 f.) O thou consecrated man of God, what art thou doing in this foul sewer, surrounded by demons and reprobates of all ages? On earth thou wast highly respected and popular in society, conversant with worldly things and at home everywhere; how must thou feel down there, "sticking fast in the mire of the deep" (*"in limo profundi"*; Ps. LXVIII, 3)! What a hellish feast for the demons when they can stow away the precious prize of a priest! How they gloat over him, exclaiming: "See, here is one who was once a knight of Jesus Christ; now he is ours! Come, let us tread upon this savorless salt of the earth!" (Cfr. Matth. V, 13).

II. *Poena Sensus*

As we read Sacred Scripture, there often flashes before our eyes the word *ignis*. *"Ignis aeternus"* (Matth. XXV, 41) is more than a mere figure, it is a stern reality. *"Quamvis miris, tamen veris modis,"*— strangely, yet truly does this fire torture the damned, says St. Augustine.[2] "The smoke of their torments," we read in the Apocalypse, "shall ascend up for ever

[2] *De Civitate Dei*, l. XXI, c. 10, n. 1.

and ever" (XIV, 11). See the lurid flames and the hideous smoke of Sodom and Gomorrah rising towards heaven—it is a symbol of the *fumus tormentorum* that belches from the burning Sodom of eternity. Our Saviour does not compare the fire of hell with earthly fire, but employs the frightful expression: "The fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matth. XXV, 41). We know of the enmity that exists between God and the fallen angels; we know from the exorcisms of the Gospel how terribly severe, how absolutely unmerciful was Our Blessed Saviour's treatment of the evil spirits; and from this we can infer what sort of a fire must be that which God has prepared for them.

Imagine a priest in that fire! Is he not like a withered branch, cut off from the vine, wood especially fit to be burned? How the greedy flames (*"aemulatio ignis"*; Hebr. X, 27) lay hold of his consecrated members and for all eternity lick the marks of his priestly dignity! Behold Jonas drifting in the depths of the sea, *"abiectus a conspectu oculorum tuorum"* (Jon. II, 5), and apply this picture to the reprobate prophet of the New Testament, the damned priest, who, having been cast out of the sight of God, sinks deeper and deeper into the boundless pit of fire. *"Igne salietur"* (Mark IX, 48), he shall be salted with the penetrating, dreadfully corroding torture of fire. O you whom the fever of one night makes so impatient, how would you endure the eternal torments of hell? (*"cruciabuntur die ac nocte in saecula saeculorum"*; Apoc. XX, 10).

This, then, is the *"mors sine morte"* (S. Gregory the Great [3]), which we have contemplated in the language of Holy Scripture as the *poena damni et sensus.* While thus suffering the loss of God and positive torments, the damned are reminded of the past,—of the sins they have committed and the graces they have flouted. This is the frightful *"worm"* spoken of in Holy Scripture (Mark IX, 43). "Bred by sin," says St. Bernard,[4] "it clings to the soul and never ceases to gnaw at the conscience. It feeds upon this inconsumable food and thereby perpetuates its life."

But let us turn away from this frightful sight. It is said that divers, when working on the bottom of the sea, are not easily frightened, either by the monsters of the deep that often approach very closely, or by other objects they see; but at the sight of a corpse down there, says one of them, we shudder and turn away, because it reminds us of our own fate in case of a mishap. We have done as St. Bernard advised (*"descendamus viventes,"*) we have descended alive into the depths of hell, and what terrified us most was that we saw there one of our own kind,—a priest. We can not forget his fallow form caught in the dread embrace of the "second death" (Apoc. XX, 14). Do you realize now what may happen to you? Do you see

[3] *"Fit ergo miseris mors sine morte, finis sine fine, defectus sine defectu: quia et mors vivit et finis semper incipit et defectus deficere nescit."* (*Moral.*, l. IX, c. 39).

[4] *"Semel iniectus vel innatus per peccatum haesit firmiter, nequaquam deinceps avellendus. Nec cessat rodere conscientiam eaque pastus, esca utique inconsumptibili, perpetuat vitam."* (*De Considerat.*, V, 12).

what awful power God has over you? *"Potest et animam et corpus perdere in gehennam"* (Matth. X, 28). What else is there to do but to *fear* Him? Yes, fear Him; *"ita dico vobis, hunc timete,"* significantly says the Divine Saviour (Luke XII, 5). Hell must inspire us with the fear of God. How indispensable is that fear for a well-ordered priestly life! Should not the fear of hell steel each one of us against the temptations of the flesh? Should it not destroy in our hearts the taste for the things of this world, compel us to meditate, to enter the confessional, to visit the school and the sick-room? Should not this fear compel us to put our affairs in order and to lead a holy life, for which, thank God, the divine mercy still gives us time? Judgment has not yet been rendered in our case, there is yet before us that *aut, aut,*— *"aut vitis, aut ignis,"* as St. Augustine says (*Tr. in Ioann.*, 81, 3; Migne, *P. L.* 35, 1842), that is to say, you must be either a branch upon the living vine or dead wood in the fire.

The Redemptorist lay-brother St. Gerard Majella, a contemporary of St. Alphonsus de' Liguori, once met a priest who led a very sinful life and had come to the retreat only for the sake of appearances. The man of God saw through the unfortunate priest, and, after the fashion of Saints, boldly entered his room without an introduction and spoke to him of the evil state of his soul. He said to him: "God is not mocked (Gal. VI, 7); behold what awaits you if you do not repent!" St. Gerard made a sign with his hand, and to the eyes of the priest there appeared the frightful form of a

reprobate sinner rising from hell. The guilty priest trembled all over. "Away, beast!" said the brother, as he noticed the impression the apparition had made. The demon disappeared. The sinner was greatly moved, became converted and led an exemplary life.[5]

[5] Dilgskron, *Leben des seligen Gerhard Majella,* 1879, p. 130.

FOURTH MEDITATION

ETERNITY

"MEMORIA *aeternitatis magistra sanctitatis.*" To work out one's salvation, to avoid sin, to subdue the passions, to escape hell,—all this can be more effectively done when the heart is saturated with the thought of eternity, which St. Augustine[1] calls *"the great thought,"* and of which he says that one is able to meditate upon it only in the profoundest silence of the soul.

We will first consider the significance of eternity, and, secondly, how near eternity is to us.

I. *The Significance of Eternity*

1. The human soul is immortal; it belongs to the incorruptible things, as the philosophers of old were wont to say. The body is perishable and must die; but faith teaches that it will rise again and after the resurrection will be eternal also. Hence man must ever regard himself as a creature of eternity, whose existence is not exhausted by millions or even billions

[1] *"Qui sunt aeterni anni? Magna cogitatio. Vide, si vult ista cogitatio nisi magnum silentium. Ab omni forinsecus strepitu, ab omni rerum humanarum tumultu intus requiescat, qui cogitare vult annos istos aeternos."* (*Enarr. in Ps.*, LXXVI, Sermo 8; Migne, P. L. 36, 976).

of years, but is simply eternal. Its eternity is not, of course, the eternity of God, but what theologians call *aevum.*[2] After death I shall not only be the same person I am now, but also the same priest, *"sacerdos in aeternum." "Quidquid aeternum est, semper est,"* says St. Augustine.[3] Holy Orders has determined the manner of my existence once for all, and the real sphere for which I live is eternity.

2. The priest should possess the *spirit of eternity;* his soul should be wholly immersed therein. Everything in our calling is calculated to suggest thoughts of eternity. Daily we hold in our hands a book replete with thoughts of eternity, the Breviary. No man utters the word "eternity" as frequently as the Catholic priest. How often do we not say: *"Per omnia saecula saeculorum,"* which certainly is not intended to be simply a hackneyed phrase. The firmament which the Church spreads over us daily in meditation, Mass, prayer, sermon, administration of the Sacraments, is eternity.

3. If the thought of eternity dominates the soul of the priest, it will necessarily affect his view of time. The priest who regards time always in the light of eternity will be overwhelmingly impressed, on the one hand with the *insignificance,* on the other with the *significance,* of this temporal life.

(a) Time is *insignificant* and fleeting from one

[2] St. Thomas, *Summa Th.,* 1a, qu. 10, a. 5.
[3] *Enarr. in Ps.,* 2 Sermo, n. 6; Migne, 36, 71.

point of view. The good priest loves to dwell upon those pages of Sacred Scripture which depict the transitoriness of all terrestrial things, especially of human life; for instance Ps. CII, 15 and 16: "Man's days are as grass, as the flowers of the field so shall he flourish. For the wind shall pass over him, and he shall not be." The life of a priest, in its temporal aspect, resembles that of a flower. Every year fresh priestly blossoms mature in this diocese, but alas, their morning is soon past. I have often sadly said to myself upon seeing such a one after the lapse of a few years: "Oh, what is man!" (Ps. VIII, 5). At a certain celebration not long ago I saw a number of priests whom I had known in their youth. Time had furrowed their brows; destruction had already commenced upon the faces of some of them; it seemed to me as if I could detect there the disease of which they were fated to die. What a sad decay often marks the advanced years of men whose spirit once commanded admiration! *"Efflorebit tamquam flos agri."*

To the well-known image of the flower Holy Scripture adds another, even more striking and humiliating, in order to illustrate the fleetingness of life. It is that of *umbra,* shadow (Job XIV, 2). How many of these shadows have we seen hurrying by, how many persons prominent in public life have been swept past us and disappeared! *"Umbra declinans,"* says the Psalmist (CVIII, 23), man is a declining shadow that grows ever more uncertain, until finally it dissolves into the universal darkness. You, too, are a

mere shadow. Shadow-like you walk up and down the aisles of your church, through the passages of the rectory, the streets of your town, *"sicut umbra cum declinat."* Who remembers your predecessors of a hundred or even fifty years ago? Who will think of you fifty or a hundred years from now?

But Holy Scripture reaches yet more deeply into the wonderful treasure-box of her imagery, in order to demonstrate the transitory nature of earthly things. She calls life a *dream.* The life of the mighty is a dream of power; that of the wealthy, a dream of riches; that of the ambitious, a dream of honors; that of the sensual, a dream of pleasure,—a short dream of the night; nay, not even that, not the dream of one sleeping, but a *"somnium surgentium"* (Ps. LXXII, 20), the dream of one rising, who has already shaken off the visions of the night.

Let us regard the three objects just mentioned,—"flower," "shadow," "dream," in the light of eternity, and what must we think of this life, to which we cling so eagerly,—a faded flower, a dissolving shadow, a cast-off dream? It would be easy to multiply these Scriptural similes. The Bible likens life to a *post* that runneth on (Wisd. V, 9), to a *spider's web* (Ps. LXXXIX, 9), to a passing *wind* (Job VII, 7), and says the years of a man's life, when compared with eternity, are as a *drop* of the sea or a *pebble* in the sand. (Eccli. XVIII, 8). What do old men think of the years they have left behind them? "The whole of my life seems to have shriveled into one short moment," said the renowned Bishop Hefele when he was near

death. "I feel as though I had once walked through town," says another famous man. "It seems to me as if I had but just crossed the meadow," said an old grandmother when about to die. An important life and an insignificant life,—both are equally brief and fleeting. *"Quid finem habet, breve est,"* says St. Augustine.[4] Yonder river flows majestically through the land; but at length it disappears in the sea, just as the little brook that drops into the ocean after a few hours' run. In the bosom of the sea it is impossible to distinguish the water of the mighty river from that of the humble brook.

Let us meditate often and long on the insignificance and brevity of time as compared with eternity, for it is a salutary meditation that will profit us immensely. When, as often happens, unpleasant persons and events tumble into our lives like rough and clumsy logs, let us say: *"umbra declinans,"* this disagreeable experience will pass; eternity alone will remain. *"In aeternitate stabilitas est, in tempore autem varietas."*[5] When we see insolence stalking abroad and enemies of the Church commanding great wealth, power, and respectability; when our patience is put to a severe test,—then let us say: *"somnia surgentium."* The joys of life likewise, fade much more rapidly when lit up by the sunlight of eternity. The pleasures indulged in by the worldly tend to entice the priest and to deceive him by

[4] *Enarr. in Ps.*, CXX, *Sermo* n. 10; Migne, *P. L.*, 37, 1613; cfr. *Tract in Ps.*, LX, Sermo n. 8; Migne, 36, 727.

[5] St. August., Sermo 117, al. *De Verbis Domini*, 38, c. 7; Migne, *P. L.*, 38, 666.

dangling before his eyes the *fata morgana* of earthly gratification. Imagination does its share and clothes these temptations in the most alluring colors. Whenever this happens, let us think of eternity and say: "It will bloom like a flower, it blossoms in the morning, and at night it wilts and dies. Rejoice in the hope of eternity, not in the flower of vanity." [6] The younger priests among us are more easily attracted by the dreams of youth. Let them be patient; in a few years they will clearly perceive the absolute nothingness of the things of this world. The thought of eternity teaches us also to be less attached to our belongings,—our home, furniture, books, etc. In the light of eternity the biggest stack of valuable bonds and stocks seems ridiculously insignificant. The thought of the shortness of life will moderate excessive zeal, it will cool the burning thirst for news, it will silence and calm the heart. And as regards the quest of worldly honors,—petty offices, empty titles, popularity, publicity,—the good priest, as his appreciation of eternity increases, will more and more abandon the unprofitable chase after these shadows. He will learn to live in the world and mingle with men as though he were not of the world (John XVII, 14), like a spiritual anchorite inwardly detached from the world, like an apparition from a higher sphere. How clearly is it noticeable to outsiders whether or not a priest has impressed upon his soul the memory of the eternal years (Ps. LXXVI, 6), whether or not his daily thoughts are impregnated with the odor of the next world.

[6] St. August., Sermo 171, al. *De Verb. Dom.* 37, c. 5.

(b) *The significance of time.* Time, as we have seen, is insignificant. But this aspect is incomplete and would tend to render a person pessimistic rather than wise, were it not supplemented by another, namely, that of the significance of time when viewed as a preparation for eternity. Though short and fleeting, time is for us the creator of eternity. The *"breve temporis spatium"* of this life decides our fate in the next world. Oh, let us often say to ourselves: These days, weeks, and years that pass so quickly, are building up my eternity. Our eternity depends upon how we employ time. If I should pass into eternity at this very moment, my entire future life would bear the imprint of my soul's present condition. *"Ex momento dependet aeternitas."*

How precious are the years of our priesthood! They become the more precious, the farther we advance, the higher we rise, the more closely we approach the end. In the narrow compass of this temporal life we can gain the kingdom of eternal freedom. The Saints knew this well, even such youths as Stanislaus Kostka, and therefore they valued time so highly. "It is not my time, it is God's time," says St. Francis de Sales; and the Church admonishes us that we should purchase time *"instanter operando."* [7] Let us, therefore, labor ceaselessly *now!* That is what all great priests have done. St. Alphonsus de' Liguori made a vow to be always busy. How reprehensible is the contempt for, and the waste of time practiced especially by persons in high position, as though time were a cheap commodity and not a treasure wherewithal to purchase eternity.

[7] *Oratio de S. Stanislao Kostka.*

Do you, perhaps, dispose of an inexhaustible supply of time, my friend, so that you can afford to throw it out of the window, as a millionaire can do with his money? In a certain sense time is the very first of God's graces and the prerequisite of all others. Let not a single particle of it escape thee—*"particula boni doni non te praetereat!"* (Eccli. XIV, 14). Ah, if a priest idles away his time, how many hours, days, weeks, does he not lose,—precious time that should be devoted to his soul, to his vocation, to sacred theology! "Men are liars in the balance!" (Ps. LXI, 10). Oh, let us try always to make use of correct weights and measures! The only true weight and measure of the priest is *eternity*. Let us employ our time in the light of eternity and strive constantly for greater perfection!

II. *The Nearness of Eternity*

1. In this second point of our meditation we will consider the nearness of eternity. It is a fact that you and I stand at the door of eternity. This door may open at any moment,—either slowly or suddenly. You and I stand on the shore of eternity, and the voyage may begin at any moment. Perhaps the first signal for our departure has already been given. This buzzing in the head, this sharp pain about the heart, this asthma, may be the signal.

2. What conclusion should we draw from this? St. Jerome answers: *"Vive, quasi hodie moriturus."* This short sentence, if it were made the rule of your

life, would work miracles. It would despatch that heap of unfinished business, settle those frequently postponed important affairs, clear up that neglected case of conscience. Live as though you might die any day: that is, judge yourself and straighten out your affairs! Are all your temporal affairs prudently arranged? Your money matters, your last will and testament, bequests, Mass stipends? Is there nothing among your written memoranda (*libri prohibiti,* correspondence, *notamina,* etc.) which might cause mischief if it were to fall into wrong hands? Are your relations to your superiors and your fellow-priests such as to enable you to appear calmly before the Great Judge? Have you righted all wrongs, offenses, enmities, scandals? Does your conscience give you the assurance that you are ready to venture upon the great journey? You stand *ad litus aeternitatis.* Those who are about to embark for a voyage across the ocean, are all prepared and ready; ought not the priest to be ever ready to step into the boat on his voyage into eternity?

3. This eternity which is so near to me, will be either happy or unhappy. What a terrible thought! I stand before a door and know not, when it opens, whether I shall fall into a yawning abyss, or enter upon a laughing, sunny meadow. Both eventualities are possible. You stand before a closed gate, behind which there lies an eternity either of happiness or of woe. Can you remain calm and imperturbed at this thought? Is it not sufficient to thrill the most apathetic soul?

4. *"Si ceciderit lignum ad austrum aut ad aquilonem, in quocunque loco ceciderit, ibi erit"* (Eccles. XI, 3). You are like that tree. Whichever way you fall, there you will lie for ever. At present you spread your crown beneath the sun, but once death has felled you,—and that may happen at any moment, before the close of this very day,—you will find yourself in one of two kinds of eternity: *"ad austrum,"* towards the bright, joyous south of blessedness, *"aut ad aquilonem,"* towards the gloomy north of eternal night. And where you fall, there you shall remain for ever. Such is the stability of eternity, which baffles the imagination and sends a cold chill through our hearts.

But is it utterly impossible for us to foresee in which direction the tree of our life will fall? "Where its greatest and heaviest branches are, thither, no doubt, the tree will fall," says St. Bernard.[8] It will fall in the direction in which it has long leaned. The application is plain. You, my dear friend, when you die, will fall to the side to which you now gravitate. In your earlier years, perhaps, you turned with joy and courage towards the light, but by degrees your spiritual growth began to stop. Your soul turned towards the cold, rough north. If this be so, and you notice a

[8] *"Porro homines sicut arbores vidit aliquis* (Marc. VIII, 24). *Exciditur autem arbor in morte, et quocunque ceciderit, ibi erit, quia ibi te iudicabit Deus, ubi invenerit. Ibi, inquam, erit immutabiliter et irretractabiliter. Videat, quo casura sit antequam cadat . . . Quo vero casura sit, si scire volueris, ramos eius attende. Unde maior est copia ramorum et ponderosior, inde casurum ne dubites, si tamen fuerit, tunc excisa."* (*Sermo* n. *De Div.*, 85, *De Casu Animae Irretractabili.*)

dangerous leaning to the side of sin, oh, then it is time to set the tree aright before Death, with a mighty blow of his ax, makes it fall precipitately towards midnight. To bend back a tree is, of course, no easy matter. A man of forty or fifty does not readily change his character. But if it must be, then, in the face of impending eternity, let violence be used, cost it what it may! If a priest who has unfortunately died in mortal sin, whose fate is irrevocable, could return from the other world, how would he not exert himself to grow in the right direction! We are luckily still in a position to do this. Let us, then, try to grow towards the *consortium lucis!* The thought of the nearness of eternity has disposed many a priest to earnestness and made him an ascetic. He who believes in eternity and does not sanctify himself, said Blessed Juan da Avila, deserves to be locked up in a madhouse.

FIFTH MEDITATION

CONVERSIO S. PAULI

In the present meditation we shall follow the train of thought to which our last meditation led us, and speak of conversion. The fruit of every retreat is conversion. If it be not a turning away from mortal sin, it shall at any rate be a turning from an imperfect to a more perfect, to a truly sacerdotal life. *"Qui iustus est, iustificetur adhuc, et sanctus santificetur adhuc"* (Apoc. XXII, 11). By way of a stimulant (*"exempla trahunt"*) let us consider a famous example presented to us by Holy Scripture. Biblical personages often have something about them that transcends time and place, something that is as universal as Scripture itself. This is true of the powerful personality whose conversion we are about to consider, the Apostle St. Paul. The Church attributes such great importance to this conversion that she commemorates it by a special feast, *Conversio S. Pauli,* with a magnificent Mass and Office. Let us, therefore, recall this sublime scene from the Acts of the Apostles (ch. IX).

As in every conversion, so also in that of Paul, there were two factors: God and man. Let us reflect first on the part taken by God and then on the part taken by Paul himself.

(1) What did God do?

(2) What did Paul do?

1. *What did God do?*

1. *What kind of a man* had God to deal with when He called Saul? Holy Scripture pictures him as *"Saulus, spirans minarum et caedis"* (Acts IX, 1). He was a typical zealot. What he did, he did wholeheartedly. His hatred for the Church of Christ was genuine and intense. *"Blasphemus fui et persecutor"* (1 Tim. I, 13), he himself later confessed (cfr. 1 Cor. XV, 9). The Synagogue had no better apparitor than him. Even women and children were not safe from him.

2. It is a sublime and touching spectacle to contemplate the *mercy of God* floating high and majestically like an eagle above this fanatical young man. The Blessed Trinity from all eternity had special designs with regard to this soul,—designs of peace (Jer. XXIX, 11), and wished to raise this erring creature to the highest degree of sanctity. God wished to show the world what grace can do if bent on conquest, how a single "chosen arrow" (Is. XLIX, 2) from His quiver infallibly reaches its mark. Let us attentively consider the various incidents of this conversion and acquaint ourselves with the wonderful strategy employed by the divine mercy towards Saul.

"Contigit, ut appropinquaret Damasco" (IX, 3). Saul was nearing Damascus. God bides His time, He can wait. For a while He gives His creatures full scope. Just as Saul was about to draw the meshes around his victims and reach the peak of his furious

persecutions, the eagle of mercy suddenly pounced upon him and carried him off as its prey; *"subito circumfulsit eum lux."* God sends His light, both interior and exterior, a "flood of light." [1] Very little more is required; yet a few words, and one of the greatest miracles of grace is accomplished:—*"ex persecutore apostolus factus est, de lupo ovis, de ove pastor."* [2]

3. If we survey our own past life, do we not find something that resembles the conversion of the Apostle of the Gentiles? Were we never like Saul on the way to Damascus? Did not youthful errors give a wrong direction to our life, were we not on the way to the Damascus of wantonness, guided by some sinful delusion that pushed us precipitately upon a wrong course? "For the sins of my youth," the ever pure St. Alphonsus dolefully complains, "I must blush; over the sins of my manhood I must weep." Did not a light come over us from above? Whichever way it happened, grace cast its light around us; a voice entered our soul like a stroke of lightning. Recall the retreats of your seminary days, when a light came over you that made you blind to the world and let you see nothing but God and eternity, Heaven and hell, Jesus Christ and His truth! That was the love of Christ, who, notwithstanding your unworthiness, waited patiently, converted you, and then with sweet violence forced you through the narrow

[1] Chrysostom, 4 Panegyric on St. Paul, Montfauc., II, 588.

[2] August., *Sermo.* 175, *al. De Verbis Apostoli,* 9, c. 7. 8; Migne, *P. L.,* 38, 949.

gate of the priesthood to become a vessel of election destined to carry the Name of Christ before high and low (Acts IX, 15). For some of us ordination and its grace lie far behind, and life has dimmed our memory. But the holy Angel who is with us has forgotten nothing and often thanks God in our stead. This much must be clear to us: if God had not favored us with a superabundance of mercy, a veritable shower of grace, we should never have entered the priesthood. What will be our astonishment when we shall learn all the facts, when we shall see exposed before our eyes all the master strokes of the strategy by which God led us into this holy state!

4. But in spite of the luminous course assigned to us when we entered the priesthood, we found ourselves after ordination again treading dark and devious paths. Again we resembled Saul on the way to Damascus. Anyone but God would have tired of us; but He always comes again, sends His heavenly light anew upon our misty path, repeats His gentle admonitions, and urges us to amend. Do we not, in this very retreat, again see before us the light of grace, *"lux de caelo"?* It is no false light from below, but the true, soft, beneficent light of divine truth from above, *"lux circumfulgens,"* a radiant light that brightens all about it, and in the midst of this light is Jesus Christ, who stands before us in the majesty of His Godhead and in the beauty of His humanity, in the indescribable goodness of His Heart.

What does He say to us? Can it be that He repeats

the painful question He once addressed to Saul: *"Quid me persequeris?"* (Acts IX, 4). Ah, our conscience will tell us plainly enough whether we are guilty of persecuting Him by continuous daily infidelities, by manifold negligences, or—merciful God, forbid!—whether we are attacking the helpless Lamb with the bloody knife of mortal sin. *"Ego sum Iesus, quem tu persequeris";* Jesus the Son of the eternal Father, the Son of the purest Virgin, our Saviour and Judge! Would it not be self-evident to everyone if He said to us: *"Ego sum Iesus, quem tu diligis?"* Who, O priest, deserves your love more than He? Woe to you if He is compelled to say: *"Ego sum Iesus, quem tu persequeris!"* Does that not sound like a riddle for heaven and earth, against which Holy Scripture hurls its anathema? *"Si quis non diligit Dominum Iesum, anathema sit. Maranatha!"* (1 Cor. XVI, 22).

But can a soul that persecutes Jesus be happy? Ah, the priest's soul, like Saul's, feels again and again that *it is hard to kick against the goad* (Acts IX, 5). We do not injure God, but ourselves, if we resist Him. *"Durum est,"*—this life of lukewarmness is unendurable, it will undo me; I am losing all my energy, I have no more joy. Why were the Saints so cheerful and happy, and why am I so sullen and dissatisfied? Because *"durum est contra stimulum calcitrare."* God often leads us *ad absurdum* through ourselves, so that we are compelled to say: This will never do; I shall be robbed of my interior peace, lose my joy of life, if I resist the promptings of Him who ceaselessly calls

me to greater perfection. I shall simply be an unhappy man if I am not a zealous priest. Return, therefore, O priest, to your better self; follow the invitation addressed to you! For, hard as it is to "kick against the goad," it is sweet to follow Christ.

II. *What did Paul do?*

1. *"Tremens ac stupens dixit: Domine quid me vis facere?"* (Acts IX, 6). The proud zealot of the law lies prostrate on the ground. He quivers at the touch of God's hand. He sees the overwhelming majesty of the Son of God and his own presumption, and it causes him to shiver. He sees the magnanimity of Christ, who has descended from Heaven to save him, and it makes him marvel. An inward trembling and astonishment ought to seize us also when God sends His light into our souls. "A single ray of divine light," says St. Teresa," humbles us more before God than all the other reasons for humility that we may consider. In the penetrating light that comes from above, we suddenly behold the sublimity of God, His purity and sanctity, and side by side with it, our indescribable mystery." *"Domine, noverim te, noverim me!"* To know God and to know oneself,—that is all that is required to make us tremble, to comprehend the peculiar way in which the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament speak of God. Even the Angels tremble. *"Tremunt potestates"* [3]—how often do we utter these words without being in the least

[3] Preface of the Mass.

impressed. *"Tremens";*—how appropriate when at the altar and when saying the Breviary! *"Ac stupens";*—we may well marvel that God bears with us, deals with us so leniently. The Saints wondered why the earth did not open and swallow them. They were not such egotists as most of us. The Missal and the Breviary are just as averse to the ego cult, and the *"tremens ac stupens"* of the great Apostle likewise speaks plainly enough.

2. Full of humility and meek as a lamb, Saul now asks: *"Domine, quid me vis facere?"* What an abject and complete surrender! It was the best thing he could do. Is there anything more blessed than to acknowledge God's victory over us? "Lord, what wilt Thou have me do?" It is an utterance full of faith. Saul recognizes God's dominion over men and submits to the indisputable authority of His sovereign will. It is an utterance full of hope. Saul knows that his fate is in the best of hands. It is an utterance full of love,—a love which is greater than his former hatred. He yields without reservation or condition, come what will. That has always been the way of the great men of the Church. St. Augustine said: *"Da, Domine, quod iubes, et iube, quod vis."* [4] St. Ignatius said: *"Fac mecum, sicut scis et vis; nam scio, quod amator sis."* What a noble, beautiful, grand example, calculated to entice us to imitation! The priest should present himself before God as an unwritten page, asking Him to write thereon what

[4] *Confess.*, X, 29.

He wills. What blessedness not to consult one's own will and whim, but to submit entirely to God:—when applying for a position, not to be guided by nature, the ambition of the *homo terrenus* (1 Cor. XV, 48); in our undertakings not to ask our self-love, but God: *"Domine, quid me vis facere?"* God will not fail to make His will known to us. He said to Saul: *"It shall be told thee, what thou must do"* (Acts IX, 7). God has His organs, interior and exterior, whereby He manifests His will. The only difficulty is that the worldly and natural man in us does not wish to take orders, but prefers to interpret God's will according to his own fancy.

3. Christ commands Saul: *"Surge et ingredere civitatem"* (*ib.*). Truly a significant command. He was to rise, not only in body, but also in spirit; to rise from a deep spiritual sleep, from the dust of the world —to a new and greater life. We too once lay prostrate on the floor, before we received Holy Orders. It was in the beautiful days of our youth. We whispered something (Is. XXIX, 4) that sounded like, *"Domine, quid me vis facere?"* and then rose again. Would that our conversion had been as steadfast, and followed by as beautiful a future, as that of Saul!

4. The Lord sent Saul into the city for a three days' retreat. Saul saw nothing, ate nothing, drank nothing, but prayed long and ardently (Acts IX, 9). God Himself said to Ananias: *"Ecce orat,"* see how he prays! (*ib.*, 11). What a spectacle! Is it not also

a spectacle for Heaven when a lukewarm, worldly priest comes to make a retreat and is converted? The Saviour can point him out to His Angels and Saints with these same words: *"Ecce orat,"* see how he prays! These spiritual exercises, made in deep recollection, were Paul's preparation for the apostleship; in this darkness of the senses he was illumined concerning the mysteries of the faith and the teaching of Christ. He came forth as the future *"Doctor Gentium,"* radiant with faith, ardent with love.

5. Can this eloquent example leave us cold? That is not the idea of the Church. Every year, on January 25, the conversion of Paul is made the occasion of a solemn, impressive petition at Holy Mass. We kiss the altar to unite ourselves intimately with Jesus Christ; we extend our hands to invite the people to pray with us; we bow to the cross, and then, with outstretched hands, before heaven and earth, we pray: *"Deus qui universum mundum beati Pauli Apostoli praedicatione docuisti, da nobis, quaesumus, ut qui hodie eius conversionem colimus, per eius exempla ad te gradiamur."* Let us realize the meaning of these exalted words which the Church places upon our unworthy lips!

(a) *"Deus, qui docuisti."* God has done it all; all honor to him! The great deeds of St. Paul are His work; but Paul was His effective instrument. *"Universum mundum beati Pauli praedicatione docuisti."* What a panegyric on St. Paul's zeal and success as a teacher! He resembles a constellation that

traverses the heavens and illuminates everything. The world is his diocese, through which he hurries as on wings.[5] Like a fecundating cloud his fourteen Epistles pass over the earth, dispensing salvation to the faithful, and never ceasing their blessed operation as long as the human race exists.[6] What incalculable fruits has not the conversion of this *one* man produced, and will it not produce until the end of the world![7] How fruitful would our own conversion be towards a truly perfect and holy life! How many souls would profit thereby! Not, indeed, *"universus mundus,"* but a whole parish would be benefited, and that is a great deal. If one soul is diocese enough for a bishop, as St. Charles Borromeo says, then one soul is parish enough for a pastor, and to benefit one soul is an exceedingly great accomplishment.

(b) We see to what heights the first part of the oration has risen. Let us listen further: *"Da nobis, quaesumus, per eius exempla."* The Church refers us to St. Paul's example, as he himself once said: "Be ye followers of me!" (1 Cor. IV, 16). If his exemplary conversion serves us as an example, all the better,

[5] St. Chrysostom, Second Panegyric on St. Paul; Montfauc., II, 580.

[6] St. Chrysostom, *De Sacerdot.*, IV, 7; Montfauc., I, 504.

[7] *"Mulios enim ab hac radice [conversione S. Pauli] ramos prodiisse videmus. Conversus Paulus conversionis minister factus est in universo mundo. Et multos quidem olim in carne adhuc . . . praedicationis officio convertit ad Deum; nunc quoque in ipso felicius vivens et apud ipsum, ne adhuc quidem cessat ab hominum conversione: dico autem exemplo, oratione, doctrina."* (S. Bernard, *In Convers. Pauli,* Sermo I, 1.)

and if our soul, like his, should burn only for Christ and His kingdom,—all the better for us and those dependent on us! *"Ut per eius exempla ad te gradiamur." "Ad te," i. e.,* to God, the Fountainhead of life, the Sun of the land of the living. *"Ad te;"* not to our own insignificant ego as a center, not to the illusions of this land of death, but to God, to whom, as St. Basil says, all things turn in unspeakable love. *"Gradiamur;"* that is, we advance by great, certain, direct strides towards God. The strides of the soul are its affections, says St. Augustine;[8] they are especially the emotions of the love that inspires us to take firm, decided, large strides across and beyond all earthly things.

(c) We cannot, of course, do all this unaided. Our knees shake, and we find ourselves unable to go ahead. Therefore we pray to God: *"Tribue, quaesumus",* and entreat Him by that which is dearest to Him: namely, *"per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, Filium tuum."* As Jesus stood before Paul, so He stands before us, *"Christus heri et hodie"* (Hebr. XIII, 8), and is our Meditator with the Father also during this holy retreat. He can and will help us, for one "who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Ghost for ever," is all-powerful; He can convert us completely, and with great strides draw us up to the Father. "Believe not that this

[8] *"Pedes enim nostri in hoc itinere [sc. ad Deum] affectus nostri sunt. Prout quisque affectum habuerit, prout quisque amorem habuerit, ita accedit vel recedit a Deo."* (*Enarr. in Ps.,* XCIV, Sermo, n 2; Migne, *P. L.,* 37, 1217).

is impossible!" St. Chrysostom cries out at the conclusion of his Fourth Panegyric on St. Paul.[9] "He who created Paul also placed you into the world; as He is his Lord, so He is also your Lord; as He glorified him, so He also wishes to crown you."

[9] Montfauc., II, 597.

SIXTH MEDITATION

PASTOR BONUS

We have thus far dwelt upon truths, motives, and examples that are calculated to draw us away from that which is transitory and sinful, and which exhales the odor of death. But whither is our immortal soul to proceed? *"Ad te,"* to Thee, O God;—that was the final note of our last meditation. And who is to guide us on this journey? St. Peter answers this question touchingly as follows (1 Pet. II, 25): "You were once as sheep going astray, but you are now converted to the pastor of your soul." What St. Peter here says is merely the echo of what Our Divine Saviour Himself said: *"Ego sum pastor bonus"* (John X, 11). The Good Shepherd:—behold the magnificent, the comprehensive, the deeply significant image by which the Saviour introduces Himself to us! When this word was spoken, old prophecies had been fulfilled, a great and holy hour had come. No other figure, perhaps, so endeared itself to the Primitive Church as that of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. In the Roman Catacombs one meets the *Pastor bonus* at every step. When a ray of dim light suddenly shows us this picture in the passages and mortuary chambers, it seems like a fervent greet-

ing of the Church of the early Martyrs to us of a later day. Let us consider this wonderful and at the same time captivating likeness of the *Pastor bonus* as it steps out from the darkness of the Catacombs and from the tenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John, and let us make a meditation *de regno Christi.*

(1) Christ, the Shepherd of nations;

(2) Christ, the Shepherd of our own soul;

(3) Christ, the Model of pastors.

I. *Christ, the Shepherd of Nations*

1. Christ is the *Shepherd of nations* foretold by the Prophet Ezechiel (XXXIV, 23), the *"pastor unus"* who shall feed all men. All His offices are included under the image of the Shepherd, especially that of the royal priesthood. But the overflowing splendor of Christ's regal glory seems moderated in the tender image of the Shepherd. The name "Shepherd" makes us think rather of the love, meekness, and condecension of the heavenly King, than of His majesty and power. Love impelled him to leave the spotless flock of the angels upon the heavenly meadows, and to descend to mankind, His legitimate heritage, given Him by the eternal Father. His sceptre is the peaceful shepherd's staff, His kingdom is a *realm of peace*, and His own are a peaceful flock. How pleasing is this picture of the shepherd-realm of Christ when viewed against the past and present realms of secular monarchs bristling with armaments! What heavenly peace do the words *"Pastor bonus"* bring to the

soul in the midst of these perturbed times! Christ, the Shepherd, who leads His sheep to pasture and precedes them on the way to an eternity of bliss! In serried ranks the sheep follow behind the Good Shepherd; new herds are constantly joining the procession, which grows more majestic the nearer it approaches the gates through which the Shepherd will safely conduct His flock into eternity!

2. The mark of the Good Shepherd is that His sheep know Him and are devoted to Him. Was there ever anyone for whom hearts beat so enthusiastically as they do for the Saviour? Who has ever drawn souls so powerfully to himself through the centuries? Who else is there, besides Christ, to whom millions of souls turn each morning with indescribable love and devotion? How wonderfully humanity gravitates towards Christ, its legitimate Shepherd! The irresistible charm of His personality, the odor of His ointments, draw humanity after Him (Cantic. I, 3). It is the *unguentum divinitatis,* as the theologians call it,[1] the ointment of His humanity in the Hypostatic Union, whereby He is the Christ, whose very name breathes fragrance.

Oh, let us joyfully acclaim this *ideal Shepherd* of humanity, "the great Pastor of sheep, in the blood of the everlasting testament" (Hebr. XIII, 20). In Him the ancient dream of mankind has become real. There have been other kings who were shepherds of their people, but there is none other like Him

[1] Scheeben, II, p. 853.

whom the Church on Palm Sunday greets as *"Rex bone, Rex clemens."*

II. *Christ, the Shepherd of our Souls*

1. We must interpret this title *quite personally* and say: "Christ and I," or pray, as we often do in the words of Ps. XXII, 1: *"Dominus regit me."* The picture of the Good Shepherd represents this marvelously intimate and tender relation of Christ to the individual soul: *"familiaritas stupenda nimis."* [2] Wherein does this relation show itself? It is written on the pages of our heart. It is a delicious secret code that others cannot read, but that to us recounts a thousand proofs of solicitude and love on the part of the Good Shepherd. How often did we not go astray (Is. LIII, 6), and He carried us back upon His shoulders! How often even now do we not turn aside from the right path, *"unusquisque in viam suam"* (*ib.*), to graze by ourselves along the road of false opinions, pet passions, and yet, never tiring, He carries us back and sets us down *"in loco pascuae"* (Ps. XXII, 2).

There is a twofold pasture of souls. First, the *pascua doctrinae,* the field of grand old truths, the ever-verdant pasture of Holy Writ, of the Fathers, of sacred science, and of interior prayer. How much solid and palatable food has our soul found in this pasture during many years! How many laymen, bound by secular vocations and family cares, envy

[2] *Imit. of Christ,* II, 1.

us this privilege! Somebody once made the naïve remark: "Would that I could read as many beautiful books as the clergy!" There is, secondly, the *pascua sacramentorum,* which the Good Shepherd spreads before us. What an abundance of refreshing water gushes forth there upon the wounded soul! How many are there out in the world,—intelligent, brilliant, richly endowed men—and women too,—who hunger and languish for something,—they know not what. *We* know what it is: they hunger after God and Christ, whilst we recline daily at the fountain of grace, sit at the Eucharistic table, and anticipate the eternal banquet of Heaven, renewing all the while the youth and beauty of our souls, even though our bodies are aged and drooping (Ps. XLII, 4). The Good Shepherd follows us with His mercy wherever we go. Lessing once said: "He who believes what the Catholic priest believes of himself, must be the happiest man on earth." Thou hast guessed aright, frigid skeptic! We priests can be exceedingly happy, if we but will!

2. But *what does this love of the Good Shepherd demand of us?*

It demands all that the relation of sheep to their shepherd implies. The faithful sheep clings to its shepherd; it is devoted to him and follows him.

(a) I mean in the first place *devotedness of the intellect* to the spirit, the teachings, and the principles of Christ, so that we may learn to know Him better

(*"cognoscunt me meae"*) and to distinguish His voice from that of the stranger (John X, 14). Are we sufficiently familiar with His voice? It is a great grace to know Christ. St. Paul, after his conversion, valued the *"eminens scientia Christi"* (Philipp. III, 8) above everything else. To know Christ was his joy, the greatest delight of his life. In the Gospels, in papal encyclicals, in the pastoral letters of our bishops, we twentieth-century sheep of Christ recognize the voice of our Shepherd. The alluring call of the world, the whisperings of infidels and modernists we disregard as the voice of the stranger. Blessed are we if our ear is attuned to the voice of the Good Shepherd, if, in other words, we possess the Catholic instinct which enables us readily to detect the foreign accent in whatever message is not genuinely Catholic.

(b) He who knows Jesus must *love* Him. Once the intellect has learned to know Him, the heart will go out to Him spontaneously. *"Amor nostrae dulcedinis,"* says the hymn *"Iesu, dulcis memoria."* "Jesus sweetness, Jesus love," St. Catherine of Siena again and again exclaims. It is natural for the heart to become enthusiastic and devoted whenever it encounters beauty and amiability. Jesus is the Sovereign Beauty, a personality of such exalted endowments, such wonderful virtue, such depth of soul and goodness of heart, all suffused with the glory of the Godhead, that if He comes to meet us, there is but one thing to do, and that is to exclaim: *"O Iesu amantissime, amo te ardentissime!"*

(c) But love is not merely emotion, it should inflame the will, so that it devotes itself entirely to the *service* of the Good Shepherd. It is not much that we can give Him in return for His bounty, but even the smallest gift, if given gladly, is acceptable to Him.

3. This spirit of abandonment to the Saviour, the absolute surrender of intellect, heart, and will, cannot, however, be developed in man naturally, but requires the aid of supernatural grace. It is a *holy, childlike spirit,* which only Mother Church can confer. It is diametrically opposed to the so-called modern spirit, which glorifies human nature and has no use for a shepherd to guide and govern men. By taking this attitude modern man excludes himself from the Kingdom of Heaven (Matth. XVIII, 3), forfeits the fountain of purest joy, and in the end feels altogether wretched, whereas nobility, simplicity, and wisdom are combined in what we call the supernaturally childlike mind. If a childlike mind be a relic of Paradise in the natural sphere, how much more is this true in the supernatural realm, where men become children of God through Baptism, and, notwithstanding all education and progress, remain children to the grave. The entire liturgy, Holy Writ, and Catholic ascetical literature are filled with this childlike spirit. Take, for instance, the precious verses about the shepherd and the sheep in the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. The priest, too, should strive after this rare jewel of a childlike confidence in the

Lord. It is the truest and most beautiful relation in which we can stand towards the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

III. *The Good Shepherd, Model of Pastors*

The sacerdotal vocation involves the duty of laboring not only for our own salvation, but also for the salvation of others. This is called pastoration, and the very word reminds us of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Here we see the *Pastor bonus* standing before us in a new and wondrous light, as our prototype and our model in the cure of souls. He is the ideal pastor, the Prince of pastors (*"archipastor"*; 1 Pet. V, 4). He is pastoral theology incarnate. Every pastor here below is but a follower of Christ, wise and enlightened only in proportion as he aims to resemble Him. Let us try to gather from the pastoral address of Our Lord those beautiful traits that will render our pastorate a reflection of His.

1. First of all Our Divine Saviour designates Himself as the *legitimate shepherd,* to whom alone the owner of the flock, the Heavenly Father, has given the right to enter the sheepfold (John X, 1 ff.). We priests are also lawful shepherds. We have entered the sheepfold by the door, which is Christ. It is indeed an exalted office to be a priest and shepherd by God's grace. Everyone who would belong to Christ's sheepfold must apply to us. Let us cultivate this consciousness of our legitimate, divine right to

feed and govern souls. It gives us strength and assurance and the proper air of authority in our bearing. *"Pro Christo legatione fungimur,"* says the humble Apostle of the Gentiles with holy elation (2 Cor. V, 20).

2. We have the commission of a shepherd; have we also the *heart of a shepherd,* as depicted by our Lord in His pastoral address? Above all, are we unselfish and disinterested? The word hireling (*"mercenarius";* John X, 12) has an uncanny sound in this parable. Disinterestedness is a peculiar characteristic of the priesthood. To want nothing for himself, neither money nor honor,—how free, how happy, how strong this makes a man! Let us show our sheep that we *love* them even as the Saviour loves them! There is much that makes it difficult to love others; but let us overlook what is unamiable, uncouth, or rude in those entrusted to our care. The Saints never scolded their people, but sent their complaints heavenward. They never showed signs of pessimism, that corrosive acid which spoils the priest's whole pastoral activity. "The power of love," says St. Peter Chrysologus, "makes one strong; because true love considers nothing hard, nothing bitter, nothing difficult, nothing deadly . . . If it is true love, it overcomes everything." [3]

3. *"Ante eas vadit,"* says the Saviour of the good shepherd (John X, 4), that is, the spiritual shepherd

[3] Sermo 40; Migne, *P. L.*, 52, 313.

goes before his flock, his head erect, his face turned upward, with easy step, with a courageous heart. Heaven is his goal. Why should he not be courageous and joyful? A disgruntled, ill-tempered man is unfit to lead any flock, least of all the flock of Christ.

4. The Saviour speaks of the shepherd as the *protector of the flock* (John X, 11 f.). How difficult is this particular task at the present time! Perhaps half the care of every good pastor is devoted to the task of protecting his flock against irreligious and immoral influences of every kind:—newspapers, magazines, books, etc. No sheepfold is so well guarded or so remote from danger that the enemy will not attempt to break into it. The voice of the "stranger" can be heard day and night about our fold, trying to lure the sheep to perdition. We must let our people often hear the voice of their pastor from the pulpit, in school, in the family circle, in societies. Their spiritual welfare is dear to our heart, and we will not surrender their immortal souls to the infernal wolf.

5. No doubt this vigilance demands sacrifices, but "the good shepherd," says our Lord, *"giveth his life for his sheep."* Surely he will not hesitate to sacrifice his health, his time, his strength for his flock. Luckily the *spirit of self-sacrifice* is not yet dead among the Catholic clergy. It is as urgently needed to-day as it ever was. Patriarchal conditions are disappearing more and more. The pastoral office is becoming a source of worry and a position of conflict. Let us re-

member that the Good Shepherd Himself was not surrounded by ideal conditions. The Gospel of St. John shows how unpleasant His position was. He exercised His pastoral care amid innumerable difficulties, and after being scourged and crowned with thorns, ended His life on the *arbor infelix* of the Cross. The life of many a modern shepherd of souls is also a martyrdom. The Spouse of Christ to-day has to contend with Pharisees and Sadducees, she must endure rack and rope, scourges and thorns, and the *"tolle, crucifige"* is raised against her by the populace, just as it was raised against her Divine Founder, only in a different form. Christ's saying that "the servant is not greater than his lord" (John XIII, 16) applies to every priest who refuses to be a hireling. Who can count the priests who bear the scars of savage encounters with ferocious wolves,—scars that are glorious like the wounds of Christ?

6. *"And other sheep I have, them also I must bring"* (John X, 16). As He uttered these words, the eyes of the Master swept over the countless lost sheep of the heathen world. Even now they are not all collected into *"unum ovile,"* and the *"unus pastor"* still remains an ideal of the future. But we must keep this ideal steadily before us. Our thoughts must not be confined to our congregation and its immediate surroundings. The Catholic priest, as the very name "Catholic" implies, must embrace the whole kingdom of Christ. Let us, therefore, include in the intentions of our Breviary at least once a week the foreign missions, the welfare and spiritual interests of all mankind! Nothing

will render us more like to our Saviour than this catholic, universal, pastoral spirit. For, as Tertullian says, Christ is *catholicus Patris sacerdos, i. e.,* the Father's universal priest.[4]

If we survey the world, we see how confusion is everywhere increasing outside the Church. We are living in an epoch in which the mighty heresy of Protestantism has begun to decay from within. This process cannot leave us priests indifferent. It is a new proof that "every plant which the heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matth. XV, 13). But it also reminds us of the duty of bestowing our priestly sympathy upon the poor, deluded, erring Protestants. What a great people we should be if all were gathered around the altars of the one true God! Let us, as shepherds of the *una sancta,* extend at least the aid of prayer to the erring sheep who lack both pasture and guidance, and daily beseech the Lord to bring them all into the one sheepfold, under the care of the one Shepherd!

[4] *Adv. Marc.,* IV, c. 9; Migne, *P. L.,* II, 376.

SEVENTH MEDITATION

THE HOLY EUCHARIST A COMPENDIUM OF ALL THE MYSTERIES OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

THE Good Shepherd, upon whose exalted and stirring figure we have fixed our gaze, is not far removed from us like some great historical character of the past. No, he lives right here amongst us. *"Ipsum vides, ipsum tangis,"* we can say with St. Chrysostom.[1] How can this be? The one word that explains it all is *Eucharistia.* The conception of the Holy Eucharist could have originated only with the Divine Omnipotence and Love. The ancient world knew nothing of it; the Old Testament had only mysterious figures and types. Not until the fullness of time had come was this supreme miracle embodied as the *sanctum sanctorum* in the Church of God and in humanity. If the Holy Eucharist were taken away, this world would be a measureless waste, innumerable millions would no longer know what to do or where to go. For us priests in particular the Holy Eucharist constitutes the very atmosphere of our supernatural life, *"in quo vivimus, movemur et sumus"* (Acts XVII, 28). The Blessed Sacrament is a most glorious compendium, a summary of all existing things: God and man, spirit and

[1] *Brev. Roman., Off. Votiv. de SS. Eucharistia.*

matter. It is a magnificent concentration of the works of God: creation, redemption, sanctification, beatification. Tracts on this dogma resemble angelic music, as does the whole Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist (Faber). But we will not speak of this now. According to the order laid down for our exercises by St. Ignatius, we must now reflect on the various mysteries of the life of Christ, in order to draw practical lessons from them. Let us consider these mysteries in a form that seems particularly attractive and lovable, namely, as embodied in the Holy Eucharist.

The Holy Eucharist is a real, living memorial of Jesus Christ. *"Hoc facite in meam commemorationem"* (Luke XXII, 19), says the Saviour, and this commemoration of Him should be, not only a *memoria passionis*, but a commemoration of the chief mysteries of His life. We have in the Holy Eucharist a marvelous compendium of the principal mysteries of that life, from the Nativity to the Resurrection and Ascension. All that passes before our soul in the course of the ecclesiastical year, from Advent to the last Sunday after Pentecost, is concentrated in the one mystery of the Sacrament of the Altar. Let us consider this mystery attentively.

I. *The Mysteries of Christ's Infancy and His Hidden Life at Nazareth*

1. Let us glance first at the unspeakable mystery of the *Incarnation*. The Eternal Word was made flesh

in the womb of the Virgin. In that same womb lie, as it were, the beginnings of the Blessed Eucharist. For, the Eucharist is only an expansion of the Incarnation.[2] Rightly does the Church take the Preface *de Nativitate* for the feast of Corpus Christi, and justly does she bid us sing: *"Nobis datus, nobis natus ex intacta Virgine."* By the power of consecration the priest is placed in a profound and wonderful relation to the mystery of the Incarnation. From its centre in the womb of the Virgin, the Catholic priesthood carries the Incarnation to the remotest periphery of place and time. This truth places us into a truly marvelous relation to the mystery of the Annunciation and renders us similar to the Mother of God. The Gospel *"Missus est,"* which we read so often in the course of the year, inspires the most beautiful thoughts a priest can have,—because of the similarity between the Incarnation and the Eucharist, between Mary and the priest. St. Augustine perceived this similarity and it led him to exclaim in astonishment: "O venerable dignity of the priest, in whose hands, as in the womb of the Virgin, the Word of God is made flesh!" [3] *"Quomodo fiet istud?"* Mary asked the Angel; and the answer was: *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te"*

[2] *"Extensio Incarnationis";* Hurter, *Opusc. Selecta Patrum,* XXIII, 14 ff., Oenip., 1873.

[3] This quotation is not found in the authentic works of St. Augustine, but it cannot be denied that from "the favorite thought of the holy Fathers, altar and manger, connecting the sacramental birth of the God-Man and His birth of the Virgin Mary" (Franz, *Eucharistische Wandlung,* II, 188, Würzburg, 1880), it is but a short step to the enlarged comparison in the passage cited.

(Luke I, 35). *"Quomodo?*—how is it to be?" you, too, ask every morning. The answer is: *"Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te";* the Holy Ghost will come down and accomplish that which surpasses all speech and comprehension.[4] It is the descent (*illapsus*) of the Holy Ghost upon the Host, say the Fathers. "There are two great miracles in God's Church," says the Venerable Jean-Jacques Olier, "the Virgin and the priest." Oh, how we may rejoice that the splendor radiated by the woman clothed with the sun (Apoc. XII, 1) falls first upon the Eucharistic priesthood!

2. In the mystery of the *Visitation* we continue to regard ourselves in the light of the θεοτόκος. She carried God in her womb and with the fruit of her womb entered the house of the priest in the highlands of Juda, radiating benediction, joy, and grace. There is nothing more beautiful than this young Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Queen of Angels, entering the priest's house and conveying joy. This is the work of the Divine Infant whom she carries beneath her heart. Is not the priest, too, a theophorus, a God-bearer, as St. Ignatius Martyr styles himself at the beginning of all his epistles? Deeply immersed in the atmosphere of the Holy Eucharist, daily, every morning, he is truly a Christophorus,[5] of whom it can be said as it was said of Mary: *"Beata viscera, quae*

[4] John Damascene, *De Fide Orthod.*, l. IV, c. 13.

[5] Cfr. *Martyr. S. Ignatii,* c. 2, 5. Οὕτω (by consuming the Body and Blood of Christ) γὰρ καὶ χριστοφόροι γιγνόμεθα (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Cat. Myst.,* IV, 3).

portaverunt aeterni Patris Filium." The heavenly fragrance of the altar never leaves the good priest. His whole day's work is enveloped in the odor of the Eucharist which he offered and received in the morning. This partly explains the mysterious impression which the Catholic priest often makes, inspiring good thoughts without saying a word.

3. And now to the mystery of *Bethlehem.* How many points of contact does it not contain with the Holy Eucharist? Bethlehem means "House of Bread." Has not the very name a Eucharistic connotation? In the three Masses we say on Christmas morning we strongly feel the relationship between the altar and the manger of the Lord. *"Clara mensa,"* an ancient Church Father calls the manger; nay, he goes so far as to speak of it as the mother of the Eucharistic table.[6] Every morning the priest carries in his hands the living fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias (IX, 6): *"Puer natus est nobis, filius datus est nobis."* Behold, the fecundity of the virginal priesthood, which is presented every morning with a son!

May I call your attention to three words of the Christmas Gospel which are usually hurried over? The sacred writer says of Mary (Luke II, 7): *"reclinavit in praesepio,"* she laid the Infant in the manger. It

[6] Theodotus of Ancyra, *De Nativ. Christi.* Cfr. Chrysost., *De B. Philogonio,* H., VI, 3 (Montfauc., I, 609): "This table [altar] takes the place of the manger. Here too the body of the Lord is laid down, not indeed wrapped in swaddling clothes as then, but wholly enveloped by the Holy Ghost."

is rapturous to contemplate with what sentiments the Blessed Virgin performed this act,—with what profound adoration, with what intense love, but also with what consummate grace and charm. Surely the Angels gazed with astonishment on the reverence and tenderness with which the divinely chosen Mother of the God-Man took up and carried her Child. She is a model for us priests, showing us how we should treat the Blessed Sacrament. *"Reclinavit in praesepio."* How do *you* perform this duty? How do you lay Him upon the altar after the Consecration? How do you raise Him up and hold Him? Do you put your heart and soul into the act? Do love and faith guide your hand? How the Mother of God watches while you are handling the Child of her womb! How closely the Angels and many of the faithful observe your conduct,—either to their edification or to their spiritual hurt! Remember, it is the Son of a very great King with whom you are dealing. No doubt Mary required a special grace to handle the Divine Infant, so as to do justice at the same time to His Godhead and His humanity.

The *Virgo prudentissima* combined reverence with familiarity in an admirable manner. The ceremonial which governs our intercourse with His heavenly Majesty has been minutely regulated by the Church, who is guided by a profound understanding and heavenly tact. The ceremonies of the Mass breathe a spirit of reverence, worship, and holy familiarity; but they also reveal a very delicate sense of beauty, an appreciation of the rules of propriety, and a most dig-

nified demeanor. How thankful we should be to the Church for having regulated these things so minutely instead of leaving them to individual judgment and responsibility![7] But what shall we say of the singularities and odd gestures out of which some priests have evolved a sort of private rite of their own, hardly in harmony with the majesty of the tremendous mysteries of the Mass! In our secular courts a breach of propriety is noticed at once, and a slight blunder causes unpleasant comment. Why should the ceremonial of the Supreme King be treated with indifference, since it is not a matter of empty form, but the expression of the profoundest truths? Unfortunately there is no one to call the priest's attention to such mistakes, especially in rural districts. It might be well, therefore, if, immediately after this retreat, we would subject our way of saying Mass to a careful scrutiny and attentively read the rubrics of the Missal, or if we went back to our dusty Compendium of Sacred Liturgy for the purpose of refreshing our minds on this important subject.

4. A similar train of thought is suggested by the *adoration of the Magi. "Procidentes adoraverunt,"* the Gospel says (Matth. II, 11). The images of the Blessed Virgin Mary found in the Catacombs frequently exhibit this glorious, I might almost say divine, posture. We love to picture to our minds the three Magi prostrating themselves before the new-born King

[7] St. Chrysostom, repeatedly, *e. g., Hom. in Ioann.*, 46, 4; Montfauc., VIII, 315.

with a dignity peculiar to the Orientals; likewise the interior exaltation and queenly bearing of the *regia Virgo* (as St. Leo calls her) [8] holding the Divine Infant on her lap, fully conscious, perhaps, of the profound historical significance of this scene. How often are we priests in a similar position! How often, as we hold the Blessed Sacrament in our hands, is the *"procidentes adoraverunt"* renewed, and we behold the people falling down and bending their knees before the King of Heaven and earth! Do we always carefully obey the rubrics when we give benediction, distribute Holy Communion, or go on sick-calls? How do we hold the monstrance and the ciborium? How do we give the benediction? Would that a holy exaltation came upon us each time we performed these sacred rites! Would that there were no priest to whom this has become a routine affair, which he dispatches *nil cogitans,* with increasing thoughtlessness from year to year!

5. As to the truly splendid mystery of the *Presentation,* let us dwell upon one incident only: Mary laying her Divine Infant into the arms of Simeon. Would she have entrusted her treasure to a stranger unless she had known that he was a Saint? But how is it that she now places her Child into a hundred thousand strange arms every day at the altar? These arms are not always the arms of Saints, but too often of indifferent, lukewarm, nay, sinful priests. The Mother of God places her beloved Son also into your arms, my

[8] *De Nativ. Domini,* Sermo 1, 1.

friend. It is an act of generosity which she has learned from God, a proof of noble confidence. What does she expect of you in return? Is it not the pure heart and the pure hands of a Simeon, of a *"homo iustus,"* who conscientiously observes all the regulations of the clerical life; who is *"timoratus," i. e.,* God-fearing; who has a tender conscience and avoids even voluntary venial sin; *"expectans consolationem Israel"* (Luke II, 25); who yearns for the great hour of the Eucharistic Sacrifice; (*"et Spiritus sanctus erat in eo"; ib.*); who is a true priest, a man of the Holy Ghost? Simeon saw in his arms a little infant "and in so small a body acknowledged the majesty of the Godhead," says an ancient writer. Do thou likewise recognize in the lowly form of the Eucharistic Species that which they contain! What freshness of devotion in that aged man! He becomes young again at the sight of the Christ-Child, *"factus in puero puer,"* as St. Augustine[9] says, —a type of the priest, who, when grown old, renews his youth daily in the Holy Eucharist.

What happiness breathes from the Canticle of Simeon! What a privilege to sing it every evening, after having celebrated Mass and received Holy Communion in the morning! What a beautiful and happy day this has been for me! *"Viderunt oculi mei,"* "My eyes have seen . . . Thy Salvation" (Luke II, 30). This morning I held Christ in my hands and to-morrow I shall hold Him in my hands again. Alleluia!

Let us leave this attractive subject and pass on to Christ's hidden life at Nazareth.

[9] *Enarr. in Ps.,* XXXIX, Sermo n. 18; Migne, 36, 445.

6. St. Luke (II, 51) says: *"Venit Nazareth et erat subditus illis."* These few words present a wonderful sketch of the *hidden life* of Christ.

(a) *"Venit Nazareth."* He goes to Nazareth. He does not remain in Jerusalem after coming of age, nor does He go to Athens, nor to Alexandria, nor to the capital city of Rome. He seeks an unimportant spot, in order to live in obscurity, far from the main currents of public life. Does not the same idea prevail in the Holy Eucharist? The Nazareth of our Eucharistic Lord is the narrow tabernacle, the tiny host, under whose veil even His sacred humanity is hidden.[10] What a lesson for us who must always be on our guard against the modern tendency to do all things in a hurry, to "get rich quick," to attain fame with a nervous haste that affects even those pious souls who strive after holiness.

(b) *"Et erat subditus."* Christ, the Son of God, among whose sovereign rights is that of absolute dominion, becomes subject to mortal men. "He assumed our suffering," remarks St. Ambrose,[11] "and He also became a subject, . . . not to weaken His power, but to inculcate a useful lesson." And this submissiveness He continues in a most perfect manner in the Holy Eucharist. He foregoes freedom of action. To whom is He subject? *"Illis,"* says the Gospel, *i. e.*, to Mary and Joseph. They were saintly persons, but

[10] *"Latet simul et humanitas"*; Hymn, *"Adoro te."*
[11] *Enarr. in Ps.*, LXI, n. 6 f., Migne, 14, 1226 f.

thoroughly human. To whom is He subject in the Holy Eucharist? *"Illis,"* to men, of whatever quality they may happen to be. He obeys instantly whenever it pleases the priest to say Mass. At the Consecration we determine that He shall come, and He comes. For nineteen hundred years, in thousands of places throughout the world, He has never tired of exercising this unheard-of obedience. You, too, are a priest, my friend, and the Son of God obeys your command each day in the Holy Eucharist.[12] You could inscribe these words on the door of the tabernacle in your church: *"Venit Nazareth et erat subditus illis."* What an example for us, especially in this age of human pride, selfishness, and exaggerated autonomy! Let us learn a lesson from our Eucharistic Lord and become humble Nazarenes!

II. *The Public Life of Christ*

1. As Our Divine Saviour once wandered through the Holy Land, so He now wanders over the earth. Through the Blessed Sacrament He fills all places, all times, all zones with His gracious presence. There is no hour of the day or night when He is not somewhere on His way to the sick, in a palace, a hovel, or a prison. He crosses the sea in vessels, He wanders through deserts, steppes, and prairies; He mingles with the pedestrians that crowd the streets of our large cities. As He once walked among Jews and Gentiles, pagans and freethinkers, amid sins

[12] *"Obediente Domino voci hominis";* Jos. X, 14.

and vices, so now He passes by at every hour of the day and looks upon a fetish-worshipper in Africa, or upon a Brahmin in India, or upon a cannibal of the South Sea Islands, or upon an atheist or anarchist in Europe or America. Once He walked through the streets of ancient Rome, past the marble temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and along the Acropolis of Athens; to-day He walks past our chambers of commerce, our skyscrapers, Masonic temples, railroad offices, and hangars. For nineteen hundred years the Divine Traveler has continued His mysterious wanderings; and whilst He lived in the Holy Land only three years, His Eucharistic wanderings shall endure *"usque ad consummationem saeculi"* (Matth. XXVIII, 20). Is there a house in your parish which He has not yet visited?

Why does He thus wander about? *"Pertransiit benefaciendo"* (Acts X, 38),—this one phrase tells the whole story. The entire world is now the Promised Land, which He fills with His blessed activity and His miracles through the Holy Eucharist. To how many who are spiritually blind does He give sight to see the truth? To how many who are spiritually deaf does He open the ears to hear? To how many who are spiritually lame and palsied does He give strength to walk securely in the path of virtue? How many Apostolic vocations constantly go forth from this Sacrament, how often does He call from the tabernacle: *"Sequere me"* (Matth. VIII, 22)? Many a Magdalen falls weeping at His feet, many a publican becomes an apostle; many a Nico-

demus receives enlightenment and instruction before the altar. The precursor who prepares the way for Him is the priest. Christ has His Marthas and Marys and His pious women; He has His favorites, the children whom He gathers about Him for First Holy Communion in the Eucharistic crusade of to-day. At times there are but a few faithful souls about Him, then again He goes forth amid hosannas and a shower of flowers in glorious procession. Here acclamations, there revilings, and sometimes He is forced to flee. Oh, it is a magnificent life of Apostolic activity which the Lord of the Apostles leads in the Holy Eucharist! And as His life in the Holy Land was founded upon constant, fervent communion with God by prayer, so it is now in the Holy Eucharist. *"Erat pernoctans in oratione,"* we read of Him in the Gospel (Luke VI, 12). His wonderful, unbroken night of prayer in the Blessed Sacrament has lasted well nigh two thousand years.

2. I shall say but little of the continuation of the mysteries of the *Passion* in the Holy Eucharist. This is preëminently the *"memoria tam beatae Passionis,"* of which the Canon speaks, and in the Eucharistic Sacrifice is shown the death of the Lord (1 Cor. XI, 26). *"Pridie quam pateretur,"*—these solemn words constitute our daily introduction to the Consecration. How much is there in the Mass that reminds us of the Passion of Christ:—the species of bread derived from the seed that dies in the ground, the species of wine obtained from the grape that was crushed in the

press, the separation of the species during the Holy Sacrifice, the mystic state of death in the manner in which Christ is present under the appearances of bread and wine, the forty-eight crosses made during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. How many types known from the history of the Passion approach this Holy Sacrament! The drowsy disciples,—ah, how well we know that type! Judas, the traitor; the minions that cudgel Him with numberless profanations, the army of scoffers, and so forth. When the Blessed Sacrament is violently or stealthily seized by sacrilegious hands and shockingly profaned, does not that seem like the despicable crowd of enemies that closed in upon Our Blessed Saviour in Gethsemane and Golgotha? *"Rursum crucifigentes,"* says St. Paul of sinners: they crucify again the Son of God (Hebr. VI, 6). Truly St. Jerome is right when he says that the remembrance which the Lord left us in this mystery of the Eucharist could not be meditated upon by one who loves him truly *"sine ingenti desiderio vel fletu."* [13]

3. When we pray at Mass, *"ob memoriam passionis,"* we immediately add: *"resurrectionis et ascensionis."* *The glorious mysteries* in the life of Christ are also represented in the Holy Eucharist. The sacred eulogy, says St. Cyril of Alexandria, is a *"confessio*

[13] *"Passurus ultimam nobis commemorationem sive memoriam reliquit. Quemadmodum si quis peregre proficiscens aliquod pignus ei, quem diligit, derelinquat, ut, quotiescunque illud viderit, possit eius beneficia et amicitias memorari, quod ille, si perfecte dilexit, sine ingenti desiderio non potest videre vel fletu."* (*In I Ep. ad Corinth.*, c. 11, v. 23 f.).

quaedam resurrectionis." [14] In the Holy Eucharist is the risen, glorious body of Christ, with its spirit-like attributes,—the same body that ascended into Heaven. How beautiful is Christ's intercourse with His Apostles after the Resurrection and at the Ascension,—how lovable, how intimate, how mysterious! He eats with them (*"venite, prandete"*; John XXI, 12); He does not keep them by His side, but sends them forth (*"pasce agnos, pasce oves"*; John XXI, 15 ff.); *"euntes praedicate, euntes docete"*; (Mark XVI, 15; Matth. XXVIII, 19). Behold a reflection thereof in Our Eucharistic intercourse with the glorified Saviour:—our genial morning meal each day; our quiet association with Him in the hour of adoration; our excursions to look after the flock, to protect the sheep against the wolves, to do battle, to go to war!

4. The final mystery of the ecclesiastical year is the *Last Judgment.* Holy Scripture uses the stern word *"iudicium"* in connection with the Eucharist. The unworthy communicant, says St. Paul, *"iudicium sibi manducat et bibit"* (1 Cor. XI, 29). It is as if a judgment went forth from the Eucharist which divides men into two groups: *"Sumunt boni, sumunt mali, sorte tamen inaequali, vitae vel interitus."* [15]

We have reached the end of this meditation. It has shown us the Holy Eucharist as a truly divine work,—a marvelous recapitulation of Our Blessed

[14] Cfr. *In Ioann.*, c. vi.
[15] *"Lauda Sion."*

Saviour's life. The successive periods that constituted His earthly life are now, as it were, magnificently condensed in His Eucharistic life. It is not a pious fiction, not delightful poetry, but marvelous reality: Christ is really and truly present in the Blessed Sacrament,—*Christus totus,* with all His mysteries. This accounts for the splendid adaptability of the Holy Eucharist and the Mass to serve as the centre of each and every cycle of the ecclesiastical year. Let us strive to penetrate ever more deeply into these luminous depths and find the mysteries of God hidden in this adorable Sacrament! If we keep these mysteries constantly before our eyes, our devotion to the Holy Eucharist will acquire greater fervor, reality, and life. It is of the utmost importance that this devotion should become the centre of our priestly life and gradually take hold of our inmost self! One means to this end is the method of meditating described in this discourse.

EIGHTH MEDITATION

THE HOLY EUCHARIST AS A SCHOOL OF SACERDOTAL VIRTUES

In our last meditation we considered the Holy Eucharist as a compendium of the mysteries of the life of Christ. We will now regard it from another point of view, one that may be called eminently practical, *viz.*, as the compendium of all the virtues which graced His holy life. His virtues should be the model of our virtues, and hence in this meditation we will regard the Holy Eucharist as a *school of sacerdotal virtues.*

I. *The Holy Eucharist a School of Virtues in General*

1. The Holy Eucharist is a real school, in which Christ is the teacher. *"Coepit Iesus facere et docere,"* we read of Him in the Acts of the Apostles (I, 1). What He taught He practiced. So it is also in the Holy Eucharist. Here He practices virtues and at the same time inculcates them. What he taught and practiced while on earth, He teaches and practices in His Holy Sacrament. The Church herself looks upon the Eucharist as a school. Among

the magnificent injunctions addressed to the *ordinandi* is this one concerning the holy Mass: *"Imitamini quod tractatis."* [1] That which we perform in holy Mass, we should also imitate. We should imitate the virtues (the *Pontificale* expressly names some of them) which we see Jesus practicing at Mass. Thus the Church leads us to the *Imitation of Christ* by way of the Holy Eucharist. This is, perhaps, a new way for some to meditate on the Following of Christ. But, as we see, it is the wish of the Church, made known to us in the solemn hour of our ordination, that we should sit down at the feet of the Divine Master and in the quiet of the sanctuary listen to His sublime teaching on virtue.

2. The Holy Eucharist is not only a true school, it is also a *perfect* school, and for the following reasons.

It has the *most perfect Teacher,* Jesus Christ Himself. *"Ubi Deus magister est, quam cito discitur quod docetur,"* says St. Leo the Great.[2] Where God teaches, man learns rapidly, for God is a Teacher who gives power to learn and understand. "God teaches in such a manner that we learn what should be learned, and do what should be done," says St. Augustine.[3]

This school has the *most perfect of doctrines,* for it inculcates the *universitas virtutum,* all the virtues whereby man can serve God.

It is a school that brings its teachings down to our

[1] *Pontif. Rom., "De Ordinat. Presbyt."*

[2] *De Pentec.,* Sermo 1, 2.

[3] *Enarr. in Ps.,* CXVIII, Serm. 17, n. 3; Migne 37, 1549.

level. The moral law which it inculcates is not located high up in Heaven, whence we must draw it down, nor in the depths of the earth, for us to bring it up (Deut. XXX, 11 ff.). There is no school so easy of access as the exalted school of the Holy Eucharist.

It is, moreover, a school that is *always open.* We may attend it for hours, for days, yea, all through life, and listen to its tireless Teacher. Already in the time of the Apostles and the Martyrs many received their instructions here; and so in later periods of the Church; and Christ will continue as Eucharistic Teacher long after our bones are decayed and our name is forgotten among men.

It is a school that is *open everywhere,* in all countries, in the world's capitals and in the smallest villages; a school for the learned as well as for little children. If there be anything universal, cosmopolitan, omnipresent in this world, it is the school of the Holy Eucharist.

This school, furthermore, is perfect as regards its *manner* of instruction. Christ employs a most gentle and winning method. He is not harsh and arrogant like so many secular teachers, who so easily create dislike. The Eucharistic method is full of touching modesty and captivating charm. The voice that comes from the Eucharistic throne is indeed earnest and incisive, but at the same time mild and persuasive, full of regard for our freedom, yet apt to attract obstinate pupils.[4] It is, in a way, a *canticum novum,*

[4] *"Vox dilecti"* (Cantic. II, 8).

a new sweet song of virtue, to which we listen, a song of which our loving Master would like to hear the echo in our hearts. *"Tu es cithara et tuba,"* St. Clement of Alexandria represents our Saviour as saying to a certain man.

This school, finally, is perfect in the results which it accomplishes. The most sublime of these results is to make the pupils resemble their Teacher. Here is a teacher who molds His scholars entirely after His own pattern, and well may He do so, for He is the absolutely perfect Teacher. *"Similes ei erimus"* (1 John III, 2). We priests are already "like Him" in one sense through ordination. Let us become "like Him" also in another sense, namely, by practicing the virtues which He teaches us.

Thus many reasons urge us to attend this high-school of all priestly virtue, the Holy Eucharist, both as hearers and doers of the word (Jas. I, 22). Wherever there is a renowned teacher, thither eager students flock. Here, in the Holy Eucharist, the most excellent of teachers holds forth; *"in medio ecclesiae aperuit os suum,"* and calls to us: *"Venite, filii, docebo vos!"* (Ps. XXXIII, 12).

II. *The Holy Eucharist a School of Particular Virtues*

We will now consider some of the virtues practiced and taught by Our Divine Saviour in this Holy Sacrament.

1. There is first of all *humility*. Who can properly

portray the humility of Christ as manifested in the Holy Eucharist? Every vestige of splendor is here buried under the humble appearance of bread. Where is the majesty of His Godhead, the charm of His humanity, which once attracted all that came in contact with Him? There is not even a semblance of human form. Every insect that buzzes about the sacred Species, every flower that exhales fragrance on the altar, asserts itself more than does the *Rex gloriae* in this unassuming appearance of a thin host, which a gust of wind could carry off. Yet for centuries nothing has been able to induce Him to give up this abasement. What a lesson for us to put away pride, this most dangerous and most stupid of all human follies!

From the depth of the tabernacle we hear a voice telling us: *"Discite a me!"* (Matth. XI, 29). Every day the priest holds in his hands the lowly and humble Christ. Ought not this divine example eradicate from among the clergy that pernicious striving for earthly greatness which robs so many men out in the world of their rest,—the ambition to obtain high honors, to stand upon the mountain peaks where "all the kingdoms of the world" lie at one's feet (Matth. c. IV)? O Lord, draw us down by the divine gravity of Thy humble Sacrament,—down to the depths of Thy Eucharistic abasement, where self-love and vainglory lose their meaning, where the follower of Christ says: "I love to be ignored and counted as nothing." [5] He who holds in his hands the Holy Eucharist, ought to

[5] *Imit. Chr.*, I, 2.

learn to control his feelings and not be easily upset by slights and offenses. And as for jealousy, it is explicable in women, and perhaps also in men with whom a career and worldly success are an important part of life; but it should have no place among priests, who daily at the altar gaze into the abysmal humiliation practiced by the Son of God. Let us approach the altar and learn of Christ, the *"doctor humilitatis,"* as St. Augustine calls Him![6] "He would not teach what He Himself was not, He would not command what He did not Himself do."[7]

2. *Meekness* is the twin sister of humility. In the Holy Eucharist Our Divine Saviour shows Himself in a special manner as the *Rex mansuetus* (Matth. XXI, 5). What we read in the Gospel about His gentleness towards men and their weaknesses, that He practices in the Blessed Sacrament. In a Eucharistic antiphon for Corpus Christi the Church makes special mention of this: *"O quam suavis est, Domine, spiritus tuus, qui, ut dulcedinem tuam in filios demonstrares. . . ."*[8] *"Dulcedo in filios,"* how much tender

[6] *E. g., De Virginit.*, c. 32, 33.

[7] *Ibid.*, 35. *"Video te, bone Jesu, oculis fidei, quos aperuisti mihi, tanquam in concione generis humani clamantem ac dicentem: Venite ad me omnes, et discite a me. Quid, obsecro te, per quem facta sunt omnia, Fili Dei, et idem qui factus es inter omnia, Fili hominis, quid, ut discamus a te, venimus a te? Quoniam mitis sum, inquit, et humilis corde . . . Itane magnum est, esse parvum, ut nisi a te, qui tam magnus es, fieret, disci omnino non posset? Ita plane."* (Aug., *ibid.*; Migne, *P. L.*, 40, 416).

[8] *Ad Magnif. in II. Vesp.*

help, human and divine, do not these words denote! And how do we address him in holy Mass as we bend over the Host? *"Agnus Dei,"* and again, *"Agnus Dei,"* and a third time, *"Agnus Dei,"*—O gentle Lamb of God! Imagine an irascible, quarrelsome priest whispering daily, with a tongue reddened by the blood of this Lamb: *"Agnus Dei, dona nobis pacem!"* What a flagrant contradiction! The people cannot understand it, neither the children in school, nor those who listen to his sermons, nor the members of his household, who witness his violent outbursts of anger. Most assuredly the close proximity of the Holy Eucharist should gradually bestow upon every priest true gentleness of heart, even as the summer sun by degrees makes the hard and bitter grape soft and sweet, or as a mild climate slowly matures the delicious fruit. It is not natural gentleness which we have in mind: that would be without supernatural merit. We mean that gentleness acquired by grace and by conquering oneself, which is so necessary in dealing effectively with the souls of men. How many priests who are earnestly striving for sanctification, have for years been exposing their harsh, rude disposition to the white-hot glow of the Holy Eucharist, and succeeded in softening it, and, along with the virtue of St. Francis de Sales, have acquired also the secret of his unusual success in winning souls. *"Fili, in mansuetudine opera tua perfice et super hominum gloriam diligeris"* (Eccli. III, 19). Thou shalt be more loved than lauded by men if thou wilt acquire the amiable virtue of meekness.

3. The Apostle combines three virtues when he says: *"cum humilitate et mansuetudine, cum patientia* (Ephes. IV, 2). Let us now consider the last of this attractive trio. In his second Letter to the Thessalonians (III, 5) St. Paul speaks of the patience of Christ. This virtue Our Divine Lord exercises also in the Holy Eucharist. Cast a glance at the history of this Sacrament. It is a tale of the incomprehensible patience of Christ. How many reasons has He not had to withdraw His Eucharistic presence from men? In the very hour of its institution the world dared to offer Him a sacrilegious Communion, which has since been followed by an immense flood of sacrileges and blasphemies that will be one of the most astounding revelations on the Last Day. Yet, how patiently He bears all this! He bore it uncomplainingly when, during the so-called Reformation, He was expelled from thousands of churches; when, during the secularization, His chalices and monstrances were stored in the vaults of Jews, and His diamonds and rubies inserted in the necklaces of harlots. He bore it patiently when the Huguenots in the sixteenth century rammed consecrated Hosts into their firearms and shot them off. He uttered no complaint when the Garibaldians in 1849, in the church of San Pancrazio in Rome, made an omelet of Hosts stolen from a ciborium. He bore and still bears even worse insults. As the material world is almost continuously shaken by earthquakes, so the Eucharistic world is nearly always trembling from sacrilegious jolts. Yet the Lord in His Sacrament does not stir; He is patient. And how patient is He not

with us, notwithstanding our miserable and defective Masses. In Heaven He would have His Father, His Mother, the Angels, the Saints; at the altar He has us, —and yet He comes down and communes with us every morning.

I realize fully how much patience a priest must lay up so as to bear all adversities with equanimity. Every morning we are allowed to witness a miracle of patience, and yet, how often within the very same day the thread of our patience threatens to break, leaving its frayed ends fluttering in the wind. The unkindliness and rudeness of men, the slow progress of souls, intercourse with some disagreeable person, occasions of extraordinary fatigue, or lesser trials, such as physical indisposition, a few hours of sleeplessness at night, ought really not to tear our bark from its moorings. It is truly worth while to anchor our tossing boat anew each day to our imperturbably patient Saviour in the Blessed Sacrament. "This is the foremost virtue, not to be cast down by adversity, nor to be uplifted by success," says St. Ambrose.[9]

4. Finally there is the virtue of *poverty*. Poverty is opposed to avarice, the root of all evil (1 Tim. VI, 10), which sends its feeders deep down into the soil of humanity. Let us always remember that there lives among us in the Holy Eucharist a magnificent example of poverty, Jesus Christ, who under the humble appearance of bread and wine wanders about among us like a poor pilgrim in the valley of tears. Yet His

[9] *Enarr. in Ps.*, I, n. 31; Migne, *P. L.*, 14, 982.

is the earth and its fullness (Ps. XXIII, 1), His the gold of the mountains, His all the silk and purple. He desires to teach us in the Holy Eucharist that earthly possessions are not a blessing, nay that they are not at all worth striving after, especially for the priest. Glancing at the tabernacle, St. Vincent de Paul cried out: *"Iesus, pater pauperum, miserere nobis!"* Vincent was himself a *"pater pauperum,"* for millions passed through his hands, whilst he remained poor like his Divine Master. Woe to the priest who makes an idol of avarice (Coloss. III, 5), who does not devote the *superfluum* of what he receives for his support, according to the decrees and spirit of the Canons, to the Church and the poor, but heaps up riches until death comes along and scatters his possessions! What a contrast between such a priest and His Master! Jesus whispers to him daily in the Eucharist: *"Beati pauperes";* but the avaricious priest seems rather to think: Blessed are the rich, blessed the capitalists! In his hands he holds the Sacred Host, the ideal of poverty, but his eyes are fixed upon his ever-growing money-bags. *"Iesus, pater pauperum, miserere nobis!"* Let us be on our guard lest the love of gold ensnare us, even in advanced years, when it seems to become even more dangerous to some persons than it was in youth. We are not bound to practice actual poverty, but we must be "poor in spirit," that is, we must not set our hearts on earthly goods.[10] We should regulate

[10] Gregory the Great says: *"Si enim aeternitatem diligimus, cuncta temporalia usu, non in affectu possidemus."* (*Homil. in Ezech.*, 19).

even our necessary expenditures in the spirit of poverty. The treasure of a priest is not to be found in a drawer, not in safes or chests, nor in a bank, but, as a Saint of the olden times (St. Prosper) says: "Our riches are modesty, piety, humility, meekness." "That alone is true wealth which makes us rich in virtue," declares Pope Gregory the Great. This is precisely the nature of the riches which Christ dispenses in the Holy Eucharist. To possess ourselves of this treasure is perfectly proper. But from material wealth and the desire of it,—*"Libera nos, Domine!"* "Riches are like thorns; they lacerate the mind and cover a man with blood from the wounds which they inflict" (St. Gregory the Great).[11] Life's course is difficult enough, let us not be caught in the thorny bushes of earthly possessions which lacerate the soul!

But we must come to an end. We have not yet concluded the contemplation of the Eucharistic virtues of our Divine Saviour, and already we recognize what a splendid school the Holy Eucharist may be for us. Therefore, let me repeat once more: *"Imitamini quod tractatis!"* Let us imitate the humility, the meekness, the patience, the poverty of Jesus Christ in His Sacrament! O Lord, draw us towards Thee by the heavenly fragrance of Thy virtues in the Holy Sacrament of the Altar! *"Trahe nos post te, ut curramus in odorem unguentorum tuorum!"* (Cantic. I, 3).

[11] *Hom. in Evang.* 15.

NINTH MEDITATION

THE HOLY EUCHARIST AS A SCHOOL OF SACERDOTAL VIRTUES

(*Concluded*)

5. Obedience is one of the most difficult virtues to practice, particularly for the priest, who as a rule is accustomed to command. Therefore he needs a special model for this virtue, and he has it in Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. How *prompt* is Christ's obedience in this sacred mystery! He descends at the word of the priest. His obedience might almost be called *blind,* since He does not inquire whether the command comes from worthy or unworthy lips. It is an *absolute* obedience, for He puts Himself entirely into strange hands. He permits Himself to be carried about for miles and never asks why? He never remonstrates. *"Non contradico"* (Is. L, 5). He practices obedience *every hour* of the day and night, beginning with the institution of the Holy Eucharist and ending with the last Mass and Communion on earth. It is an obedience that is truly astounding and must be pondered before the Blessed Sacrament itself.

How necessary is this example of obedience for men! We will not speak of the world,—for we are living in an age of unmeasured liberty; we speak only of the priest. He has promised obedience to his superiors,—to the Pope before receiving subdeaconship, when making the *professio Tridentina;* to the bishop before his

ordination to the priesthood. Now it is not difficult to grow enthusiastic over obedience in theory. In practice, too, obedience to the Pope is easy enough, for he lives beyond the sea. Obedience to the bishop, however, is apt to be more difficult, because it demands personal sacrifices. And we may find it still harder to obey our immediate superior, the dean or pastor. Interior repugnance may become very pronounced, and the revolutionary spirit which lies latent in every man, may break out violently. One is apt to say: "I would gladly submit to age, ability, prudence, and holiness; but my superior is deficient in all these qualities, as everybody knows." If he really lacks all the qualities of a good superior, he has at least authority, —the divine authority of an ecclesiastical superior,— and to this you must ungrudgingly submit. Obedience to a superior may, humanly speaking, sometimes be difficult; even the Saints now and then required the aid of faith in order to practice submission. Thus, too, must we aim by continuous efforts to regard our relation to pastor, dean, and bishop, from the standpoint of faith, and not rest until this supernatural conception permeates us and the merely natural idea of obedience has been completely suppressed. Even then obedience may still be a sacrifice, but it will be easier for us to make that sacrifice, and our obedience will be more joyful, freer from pride, and more meritorious.

When, therefore, subordination to authority comes hard, be it on account of the personality of the superior or the form of the command, let us kneel before the tabernacle and make a half-hour's meditation on

the obedience of the God-Man in the Holy Eucharist; how He obeys the most imperfect and unamiable priest, listens to his curt, almost imperious command: *"Hoc est corpus meum."* This practice, if faithfully followed, would eliminate many an unpleasant scene, word, letter and explanation between superiors and inferiors. Does a priest debase himself by practicing obedience? Does the Son of God lower Himself when He obeys the newly ordained cleric? Obedience will never lower us. *"Certe non erit tibi indignum sequi auctorem tuum,"* says St. Bernard.[1] Moreover the joyful obedience shown by Christ in the Holy Eucharist should make it impossible for us to murmur, to complain, to criticize,—a "right" which we are prone to reserve to ourselves even whilst we outwardly obey. Unkindness in interpreting the motives of our superiors, interior bitterness against their commands, all that should vanish before the Holy Eucharist, even as the mist vanishes before the sun. I will leave it to each one of you to develop this thought, but we must all admit that we shall have to go to the altar for a long time before we are adepts in the practice of internal and external obedience.

6. Let us pass on to the virtue called by St. Jerome *"corona illustrior sacerdotum,"* namely, *chastity.* The Holy Eucharist is the great school of virginity. The Sacred Heart of Our Divine Saviour still is, as it once was, full of love for this exalted virtue. He is the lily of the valley (Cantic. II, 1), wafting its pure

[1] *Super Missus est, Homil.* I, 8.

fragrance heavenward, untouched by contamination. The immaculate host, the unadulterated wine which the Church requires for the Eucharistic sacrifice, the pure wax, the clean altar-cloths,—everything about the Blessed Sacrament breathes stainless purity. Should a priest have failed against chastity, his first sensation upon coming in contact with the Holy Eucharist would be that of a frightful contrast between his own spiritual condition and the atmosphere of the hidden Lord. For Christ is not only pure Himself in His Sacrament, but He requires chastity of those who serve Him,[2] and He bestows this virtue through this Sacrament. As a rule the vapors of sensuality cease hissing at the altar, temptations are more readily defeated there, and the soul is carried aloft like a dove whose wings touch not the murky waters.

"Videte lilia, quomodo crescunt;" Our Divine Saviour once said (Matth. VI, 28), and in doing so pointed out to His hearers the dewy fields, where the Heavenly Father gives growth to the lily, where it draws life from the soil through its roots and presents its chalice to the sun. You see, O priest, where the lily of purity grows and thrives: in the soil of the Holy Eucharist. Place yourself there, take root in this sacred soil, absorb its sunbeams, and gather its dew in the chalice of your heart, and you will remain pure in body and soul, even to your innermost thoughts.

7. I should like to say a few words about the Holy Eucharist as a school of *mortification.* At ordination

[2] *"Pascitur inter lilia";* Cantic. II, 16.

the *Pontificale* called our attention particularly to this point. "Imitate what you administer," we were told, "since you celebrate the mystery of the Lord's death; strive to mortify your members as regards vice and concupiscence." The holy Sacrifice of the Altar preaches penance with a mighty voice. A priest who is a worldling, with effeminate habits, given to self-indulgence and excessive luxury, who has not learned the ABC of mortification, is a crying contradiction to the Victim offered by him upon the altar.

But we must hurry on, as I have yet to speak of the queen of virtues, *charity*.

8. Our Lord practiced *love of God* in the highest degree at the moment of the Annunciation as well as throughout his earthly life, and He continues to do so in the Holy Eucharist. Innumerable tabernacles are the mystic hearths from which the flame of charity rises to Heaven. The very institution of the Blessed Sacrament was a proof of His love for God, and the continuation of that Sacrament in countless Masses is a continuance of this same love.

Does not the Saviour wish us, His priests, to harbor this love for God? Did He not in the Sacrament of Holy Orders place us under a special obligation to practice this virtue? Did He not give us the chasuble, a garment which signifies charity?[3] Do we not wear this garment, which I should like to call the livery of divine charity, every day? Every human being in this world pursues some sort of love; but the love to which

[3] "*Accipe casulam, per quam caritas intellegitur.*"

we priests are sworn is the highest and most blessed form of love, because its object is the Source of all perfection, God. Holy Scripture truly calls it "beautiful love," for it is beautiful in the highest sense and degree. It is a love *"non verbo, sed opere"* (1 John III, 18), which manifests itself by hard labor, conflict, and suffering for God's sake. This beautiful love is the greatest boon in human life. "Man's entire good is to love God, and man's entire evil is to love himself," says an ancient ecclesiastical writer. Whenever we feel the thermometer of love dropping, let us approach the burning hearth of the Holy Eucharist, or, as St. John of Damascus says [4] "take the glowing coal [from the altar], in order that, partaking of the divine fire, we may ourselves become hot."

But charity is twofold: *"Gemina dilectio,"* as we were told at our ordination, *"Dei videlicet et proximi."* We know how the Saviour loved his fellowmen while here on earth. Every chapter of the Gospel tells us about it. His Heart remains unaltered in the Holy Eucharist; it still beats for all His brethren. He loves each one of us personally, and an abundant stream of that love flows from the Eucharistic ocean directly into our hearts. This love for souls should be found also in the priest. He should be ready to spend himself for others,—that is his vocation, in that consists his happiness. Let us prove ourselves worthy of the glorious title which St. Ambrose gives to the priest: "Vicar of Christ's charity." [5] The faithful should be

[4] *De Fide Orth.*, IV, c. 13.
[5] *"Vicarius amoris Christ"; In Luc.*, l. X, 175; Migne, 15, 1942.

able to find in the priest the love and compassion of Christ;—a love that will not let the erring go astray, but will follow them and lead them back; a love that will not give up hope as long as there is life, that will abandon no one, nor be ever dismayed. Why are you so slow and awkward in your pastoral work? Perhaps it is because you lack that Christ-like love for souls,[6] which believes, hopes, and endures all things, and never fails (1 Cor. XIII, 7, 8). In the blessed days of pristine fervor some sparks of this fire glowed in our hearts. If the lapse of years and sad experience have perchance thrown ashes upon it,—away with the ashes! That fire must burn, or else we are cheated out of our most cherished treasure. Souls are waiting for us, thousands of them perhaps, created and uncreated; unless the Catholic priest will help them, they are lost. We possess the heavenly monoply of the truth of Christ and of His Sacraments, which alone can save souls and nations. But where is the crystal fountain (Apoc. IV, 6) from which this stream of ever-fresh love gushes forth? It is in the Holy Eucharist. The heretical sects, having no Sacraments, are unable to produce true priests. Go to the Blessed Sacrament and quaff the love of Christ. Devotion to the Holy Eucharist will work wonders for you.

9. We will conclude this meditation with a few words about a virtue that is complementary to all the rest,—*perseverance*. What is grander than the per-

[6] "*Deest anima, deest vita, deest ignis, breviter, magna illa caritas deest.*" (Bellarmine, *Ascens. Ment. in Deum*, grad. 6).

severance of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar? What vicissitudes of time have passed before Him! But His Real Presence remains. He exercises His virtues day and night with admirable perseverance. How great is our need of perseverance in the priestly vocation! We have made many a good start; this retreat will probably cause us to make another; but we must not forget that "the proof of a good work is perseverance." [7] Only if we persevere does the good we do acquire its full worth before God and for eternity. We must hold out in spite of all difficulties and obstacles, both interior and exterior. Our zeal should not be one that soon abates; our life should not run along in jerks, nor be subject to ebb and tide; it should rather resemble the river that flows along majestically and calmly, fed by hundreds of small streams, until it becomes deep enough and wide enough to carry our ship to eternity, no matter how heavily it is laden with responsibilities, cares, and crosses. How strongly have not the Saints recommended perseverance! St. Bernard cries out: *"Hoc ad ultimum tibi dico, persevera, persevera, persevera!"* Our Lord Himself said: *"Qui perseveraverit usque ad finem, hic salvus erit."* *"Hic,"* He says, namely, this one who perseveres, and none other, shall be saved. Let us go often to Jesus, who practices all virtues so perseveringly in the Blessed Sacrament! For 1900 years He has prac-

[7] Gregory the Great, *Homil. in Evang.* 25. Cfr. St. Bernard (*Ep., 129, ad Ianuens.*): *"Perseverantia vigor virium, virtutum consummatio est, nutrix ad meridiem, mediatrix ad praemium. . . . Tolle perseverantiam, nec obsequium mercedem habet nec beneficium gratiam nec laudem fortitudo."*

ticed humility, meekness, poverty, obedience, purity, mortification, love of God and man. He will help us to follow His example.

We have now finished our meditation on the sacerdotal virtues. Christ is a living, sublime, ravishing example of all virtues! *"Aquila provocans ad volandum"* (Deut. XXXII, 11). See how, in the Holy Eucharist, He soars before our eyes like an eagle, in order to induce us to follow Him! Oh, how ardently He desires to lift us out of this sphere of earthly sentiment, in which most men drag out their days, towards that glorious horizon which He wishes His priests to traverse! In the stillness of the sanctuary we may develop the pinions necessary for that sublime flight. Powerful is the example of Christ in the Gospel, but still more effective and stimulating is His example in the Holy Eucharist. We are wont to look upon the Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice and as a food; we should accustom ourselves to regard it also as a school, where a sweet familiar voice daily admonishes us: *"Exemplum dedi vobis, ut quemadmodum ego feci vobis, ita et vos faciatis;"* I have given you an example; as I have done to you, so do you also! (John XIII, 15).

TENTH MEDITATION

THE HOLY GHOST AND THE PRIEST

Our meditations on the Holy Eucharist have led us through the life of Christ with its mysteries, from the Incarnation to the Resurrection and Ascension, and with its virtues from humility to charity. There remains for our consideration a final mystery, which the Saviour often pointed out to His disciples as the consummation of the whole work of Redemption, *i. e.*, the coming of the Holy Ghost. This mystery is of great consequence and practical significance, especially for the priest. We will, therefore, speak of the Holy Ghost, "the great Unknown," as He has been termed, who nevertheless is everywhere and constitutes the very soul of the Christian religion. Not infrequently He is unknown even to the priest, to the great detriment of his soul and the souls of those confided to his care.

I. *The Operation of the Holy Ghost in General*

1. "The word Holy Ghost," says St. Basil,[1] "elevates us to the highest Being, infinite in power, indescribable in greatness." The Holy Ghost, like the

[1] *De Spiritu Sancto*, c. IX.

Father and the Son, is true God. That sublime region of the inner life of the *Most Blessed Trinity* unfolds itself before us, whenever, as on Sunday morning, we pray: *"Aeternus Spiritus sanctus, immensus Spiritus, omnipotens Spiritus!"* (*Symbolum Athanas.*) How often, standing at the altar, do we utter that grand truth: *"Qui* [*Spiritus sanctus*] *cum Patre et Filio simul adoratur et conglorificatur!"* Because of this divine glory the Angels yearn to behold the Holy Ghost (1 Pet. I, 12), "the embrace, the joy and jubilation of the Father and the Son," as St. Bernard calls Him.[2] Such is the interior realm of the Holy Ghost in the bosom of the Godhead.

2. But His exterior realm in this world, also is full of majesty and beauty. Take the material creation in its wonderful order and uniformity; the *Creator Spiritus* is the Finger of God, who created and developed this entrancing multiplicity and fullness of benediction. The earth, the sea, and the starry heavens are a gigantic mirror of His magnificence. Take the *world of angels,* or take *man,* that wonderful microcosm;—they are all the work of the Holy Ghost. He is the Creator and Fashioner of the human heart.[3] He is the Author of the supernatural order. It was He who created that majestic vestibule of the Church, the Old Testament, with its types, figures, and shadows of the New. With His eternal intelligence, which is not subject to limits of time and place, He directed the

[2] *In Cantic.,* Serm. 8.

[3] *"Quae tu creasti pectora;"* Hymn *Veni Creator.*

prophecies of the Old Dispensation.[4] He trained great men and women and caused them to shine like stars in the dark night of paganism. It was the Holy Ghost who ushered in that marvelous dawn that came upon mankind at the close of the Old Testament. Mary with her graces, gifts, and privileges, is the work of the Holy Ghost, His Spouse. All those incomparable marks of resemblance, both physical and spiritual, which she bore to her Divine Son, were imprinted upon her by the Holy Ghost. The realm of grace over which she holds sway, the realm of honor which is hers by the *hyperdulia* of the Church, the realm of glory wherein she reigns as Queen,—all these privileges were bestowed upon her by the Holy Ghost. His greatest work, however, is the God-Man Jesus Christ, whom He led forth in the fullness of time. Christ's Church, with her teaching office, her hierarchy, her Sacraments, her discipline, and her liturgy,—is likewise the magnificent work of the Holy Ghost.

How sublime is the internal mission of the Holy Ghost in the souls of men! When on the Day of Judgment the operation of the Holy Ghost will be revealed, both in regard to the elect who followed Him and to the rebellious angels and men who resisted Him; when His whole sublime economy of grace in guiding mankind to God and dethroning Satan will be completely disclosed and lie open before the eyes of all in its marvelous details, a storm of admiration and gratitude will burst from all creatures in honor of this central Sun of the supernatural life, who pours out

[4] *"Qui locutus est per prophetas;" Symbol. Missae.*

His rays so mightily over the world of spirits and of men!

II. *The Operation of the Holy Ghost in the Soul of the Priest*

We will now consider what the Holy Ghost has done, does, and will do in future for our souls.

1. The history of the internal operation of the Holy Ghost in your soul, my friend, is written in indelible characters by the three Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. You often administer holy Baptism and enter the names of those whom you have baptized upon the bede-roll of the Kingdom of God. In doing so, do you ever stop to think of your own *Baptism*,—of that great day when *your* name was recorded in the list of members of the new Zion, admitting you to the company of myriads of holy angels, and entering you in the race in which imperishable honors are to be won? Baptism is, indeed, the sacred portal to all things that can make man happy for time and eternity. The Holy Ghost came unsummoned; He is the best and the oldest friend of your soul.

Then dawned the day of your *Confirmation*. The world has changed since, and we, too, have changed,—physically, spiritually, temperamentally. But there is one thing which we have carried in our soul since that day, and which is as fresh and undiminished in beauty now as it was then; namely, the *sign* of the soldier of Christ, impressed upon us by the holy chrism. God

knows, and we, too, shall once realize, the significance of this Sacrament for us on our road to the priesthood. How has the Holy Ghost worked in us to prepare and shape us for the sanctuary! How different was the method He employed for each one of us! How masterfully did the psychology of the Holy Ghost control everything, always carefully adapting itself to our nature and proclivity!

Finally we received the Sacrament of *Holy Orders,* with its prodigal outpouring of grace. At the very gate, when we were given the tonsure, the Church invoked the Holy Ghost upon us (*"ut donet eis Spiritum sanctum"*). In the rite for subdeaconship the Church called down upon us the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost. The diaconate may be said to be His special province. What a happy day it was when the consecrated hand of the bishop rested on your youthful head, and he pronounced the words: *"Accipe Spiritum Sanctum ad robur et ad resistendum diabolo et tentationibus eius!"* To many priests this beautiful ceremony is one of their most cherished recollections. At last the top of the hill was reached—we were ordained to the priesthood. We heard the *"Veni Creator Spiritus"* as our hands were being anointed. Christ Himself breathed upon us in the words: *"Accipe Spiritum sanctum, quorum remiseris peccata, remissa sunt,"* etc. The *Spiritus Sanctus* was the chief factor at your ordination. Ever since then you are a priest before God, before men and yourself, baptized with a mighty spiritual Baptism, adorned with an office that is entirely of the Holy Ghost. (Even wordly-minded priests are sometimes

seized with emotion when they recall their ordination; it is as if they caught a fleeting breath of fragrance from a far-off paradise, or listened to half-forgotten, sweet sounds of happy days. I once heard an unhappy priest in a moment of tender emotion speak of his ordination in a way which I can never forget.)

2. Since the moment of ordination our office, in the words of St. Ambrose,[5] is an *"officium Spiritus Sancti."* More than other men the priest has to deal with the Holy Ghost. No Mass, no transubstantiation, no Sacrament can take place without Him; no part of the Divine Office can be recited, no sermon can be delivered, no blessing given without His co-operation. The vocational element in which we live and work is divine grace, both habitual and actual, and since the Holy Ghost is the Dispenser of grace, He is the real, life-giving element of our vocation.

How we need the Holy Ghost for a worthy performance of our priestly duties! If, as St. Basil says, "the thousand angels, and the hundred thousand ministering spirits fulfill their office only in virtue of the Holy Ghost," how much more does the priest, whose office excels that of the angels, require the Holy Ghost in order to celebrate worthily the Sacrifice of the Mass! This is indicated by the seven orations of the *accessus,* in nearly all of which the Holy Ghost is in-

[5] *"Munus Spiritus Sancti est officium sacerdotis."* (*De Poenit.*, I, c. 2; Migne, 16, 489; cfr. *De Spiritu Sancto,* I, c. 8; Migne, 16, 755).

voked. Our devotion in celebrating the Holy Sacrifice will grow in proportion as we become more intimate with Him. We shall gain much by devoutly reciting the *"Veni Creator"* before Mass. Nor are we able to say our Office well except in the Holy Ghost. St. Basil asks: "How could the Seraphim sing: holy, holy, holy,[6] unless they were instructed by the Holy Ghost?" "We can not preach without the Holy Ghost," says St. Ambrose.[7] Therefore, you let your entire congregation sing and pray to the Holy Ghost before each sermon. We also stand in need of Him when we administer the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Penance, where so much depends upon the personal activity of the priest. Who can find a solution for well nigh desperate cases unless it be indicated from above? Who will find the proper word, the suitable remedy, the right balsam for sinners, unless it be given by Him who alone can heal our wounds?[8] Who will refresh us in the monotonous work of hearing confessions, which affords such a discouraging insight into human misery and the incredible machinations of the demons, unless it be the Paraclete, God the Holy Ghost? Whence shall we derive that indomitable courage in our warfare against sin, error, and folly, if not from the *"Fons vivus,"*—the inexhaustible Fountain of

[6] Is. VI, 3.

[7] *"Nemo enim dicit Dominum Iesum nisi in Spiritu Sancto* (1 Cor. XII, 3). *Ergo si appellare Dominum Iesum sine Spiritu non possumus, utique sine Spiritu praedicare non possumus."* (*De Spiritu Sancto,* I, c. 11; Migne, 16, 763.)

[8] Sequence, *"Veni sancte Spiritus."*

Life, the Holy Ghost? It would be a grateful task to show what the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost mean for the pastor in his work.

3. If I look into the *future,* I am confronted by the question: "How shall I fare? What will happen to me ere death closes my eyes?" Life is becoming more serious every day; we are headed towards the future, yet can see only the next few steps of our scantily lighted path. Sooner or later old age will come upon us. There will be years of suffering, perhaps, and of slow dissolution. As we look about and see our own weakness, the many temptations by which we are surrounded on all sides, the universal unrest, and the many signs of moral decay everywhere in evidence,—we can perceive no help except in the *"Consolator optimus."* With Him we can gaze confidently into the future. From Him we can obtain strength and courage and perseverance and victory over the weaknesses of the flesh and the temptations arising from the downward tendency of our animal nature. From Him we may also hope for an increase of sanctifying grace and its preservation in future. This is, indeed, the highest treasure,—sanctifying grace, or, as St. Basil says, *"ut Deus fias,*—that you become God." [9] The elevation of man by grace,—which the Fathers with their mighty sweep of thought love to call θείωσις, —this state of deification is our true goal, but we can

[9] "With Him originates never-ending joy, from Him perseverance in God, from Him similitude and,—the highest gift to which you can aspire,—that you become deified." (*De Spiritu Sancto,* c. 9).

hope to reach it only through the Holy Ghost. *"Ut Deus fias,"* means that we should become God not by nature, but by grace, that is, that we should save our souls. It is a grand, supernatural ideal, but then Christianity is a divine religion, in fact, it is *the* religion *par excellence,* which raises man to the *"consortium divinae naturae"* (2 Pet. I, 4). This the Holy Ghost accomplishes here below; having first elevated us by means of grace, He makes us partakers of the divine glory. "Vision is not accomplished without the Spirit," says St. Basil the Great, and marveling he asks: "If the beginning here on earth is so glorious, what must the perfection of the whole process in the next world be?" *"Quae erit totius consummatio?"* What will the eternal vision of the Godhead be like, which will satisfy all our yearning? What will the resurrection of the body be like, when by the might of the Holy Ghost, the body of lowness (Philipp. III, 21) will be re-formed, glorified, made resplendent as the sun in the kingdom of the Father?

4. What a great *love* does not the Holy Ghost show in all this! How wonderfully does He not guide our supernatural life from Baptism through nearly all the Sacraments, by means of graces more numerous than the raindrops that fall upon the earth,—up to the final reward of the good priest, his throne in Heaven!

Oh, why do we not honor the Holy Ghost more? Why do we pay so little attention to this portion of the dogmatic teaching of the Church? Why is that highly important truth of the indwelling of the Holy

Ghost in the souls of the just not impressed upon us more vividly? Why do we forego the abundance of comfort that lies hidden in the veneration of the Holy Ghost? How easy it would be to think of Him oftener at the *Gloria Patri,* at the hymn of Tierce, or while reciting the *Credo!* What a small effort it would take to learn by heart and frequently recite the hymn, *"Veni Creator"* and the sequence *"Veni, sancte Spiritus"!* How easy it would be to devote more thought to the Holy Spirit and to show Him greater gratitude for His unutterably precious gifts (*"maxima et pretiosa"*; 2 Pet. I, 4)!

We have inscribed the Following of Christ upon our banner. Very well! The Saviour gives us the example of a deep veneration for the Holy Ghost. Not only was His Heart a treasury of the graces of the Holy Ghost; not only did He abandon Himself completely to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost; not only was His soul a lyre of purest tone, from which the Holy Ghost could draw every note He wished;—in words and deeds, too, the Saviour honored the Holy Ghost wherever He could, made Him known, and glorified Him. We must follow His example also in this respect. If in the foregoing meditations we were stirred by the fragrance and strength of Christ's teachings, then let us in conclusion be moved by His Heart's desire, to which He gave such touching expression in His farewell address;—the desire, namely, that His followers might cherish a profound attachment to the Holy Ghost. The fruits thereof will be

glorious: peace, joy, freshness, fecundity, a happy issue, and eternal bliss,—*"virtutis meritum, salutis exitum, perenne gaudium."* [10]

[10] Sequence *"Veni Sancte Spiritus."*

FIRST CONFERENCE[1]

CONFESSION AND HOLY MASS

In these conferences I should like to discuss some important points,—*nova et vetera,* more *vetera* perhaps than *nova,*—that have a bearing upon our interior life as well as upon the pastoration of souls.

I. In the first place there is the *confession* to be made in connection with the retreat.

1. For the priest as well as for the layman, confession is in one respect always a burden, of which we shall be relieved only by death. A confession that covers a period of more than ordinary length is particularly onerous. But we are driven to apply this extraordinary remedy by a sense of guilt. *"Militia est vita hominis super terram"* (Job VII, 1). The priest, too, has his battles to fight; his soul, too, is a spiritual battlefield, the scene of daily conflicts between fallen nature and the exalted demands of the priesthood. These conflicts result in bruises, gaping wounds, and, alas, sometimes in corpses. We understand this very well and at times are genuinely alarmed at the past, the present, and the future that lies beyond the gates of death. The Church makes no effort to smother this consciousness of guilt; on the contrary,

[1] To be given after the third meditation.

she fosters it. It is remarkable how frequently her prayer books, the Missal and the Breviary, speak of our sins, of the *"pondus propriae actionis,"* our nothingness, our weakness. Therefore, let us once again sit down and give an account of ourselves. We know beforehand what the result will be. As a businessman who is heavily in debt finds a big deficit when he looks through his books,—so we, too, shall discover in our accounts a deficit whose full extent is unknown to us, bcause it contains a number of hidden items which only God can duly estimate. *"Ingens peccator"* (a sinner deeply in debt) the Venerable Fr. Philip Jeningen sometimes wrote under his signature. Even the good priest feels himself burdened with manifold guilt in view of God's immeasurable majesty and spotless purity. However cheerless this annual reckoning may be, we may confidently hope to secure full rehabilitation through this balancing of accounts,—thanks to the unfathomable mercy of God and the efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance.

2. The quietude of the retreat favors a *thorough examination of conscience.* It affords us time and sharpens the eye in scrutinizing our spiritual household, thus enabling us to detect spots, cracks, and caterpillar nests (to employ an expression of St. Alphonsus), and to prepare the divine cure in the tribunal of Penance. We know what is most expedient for this purpose. It is a manly and truly priestly candor towards ourselves and the representative of God. We are dealing here with a Sacrament and with the Holy Ghost, and should

therefore be truthful and sincere. We did not come to the retreat to be complimented, or to receive the award of merit. We are here to view our lives in the bright light of God's countenance, and we do not want one scintilla of self-deception, palliation, or false color to creep in. "As God abhors him who excuses his sins, so He raises up him who confesses them," says St. Augustine.[2] The duties of our state of life will, of course, form a special subject of examination and self-accusation. Who of us can imagine that he is filling his place perfectly, that he has nothing to accuse himself of, as regards the duties of his office,—at the altar, in the pulpit, in the confessional, in school, at the sick-bed? I would mention especially that we must follow up our predominant passion and ascertain its influence upon our conduct.

The *motives of contrition* are founded upon the eternal truths and those other weighty considerations that pass before our eyes as we meditate during the retreat:—the majesty of God, which impresses us priests more forcibly than others; hell; Heaven; the Passion of Christ; the charity of God. And if these truths impress us more vividly during retreat than at other times, they will produce a precious fruit,—*i. e.*, the *"spiritus compunctionis,"* sincere contrition.

The *firm purpose of amendment.* How much consolation and relief there is in the thought that we can make good resolutions;—that, beyond the narrow pass of confession and retreat, lie beautiful, expansive regions, the years of life still left to us, which we can

[2] *Enarr. in Ps.*, CXLV, Sermo n. 2; 37, 1885.

dedicate to God. Courage, hope, a determination to do better,—all this is included in the purpose of amendment, which is so necessary and psychologically so valuable an element of the Sacrament of Penance.

The *satisfaction* we are asked to make is but a shadow of what was exacted from penitent priests in the first centuries of the Church. Let us voluntarily add something by way of expiation: the inconveniences of this retreat, the sufferings and the whole heavy *onus sacerdotii,* which we should resolve to bear always in a spirit of atonement.

Then the *"Pax vobis,"* Christ's beautiful Easter-greeting, will be extended to us. And may we hear it again every week or fortnight hereafter, at every future confession. To carry peace within ourselves in a world that has become so woefully impoverished, both as to divine and human peace, is a grand thing,—*"finis omnium bonorum desideriorum,"* as St. Augustine says.[3]

II. Let these few words about confession suffice. We will pass on to the first of the important points in the priest's life, which I wish to discuss in these conferences. By means of three things, says St. Bernard, must the priest operate: by word, by example, and by prayer, *verbo, exemplo, oratione—tria haec, maior autem est oratio.*[4] In dealing with these three

[3] Sermo 168, al. 17 ex Homil., c. 2; Migne, 38, 912.

[4] *"In hoc noveris trinitatis sacramentum in nullo frustratum a te, si pascas verbo, pascas exemplo, pascas et sanctarum fructu orationum. Manent itaque tria haec: verbum, exemplum, oratio, maior autem his est oratio." (Ep. 201, 3, ad Balduin. Abbat.)*

points I will give the first place to *prayer,* and begin with its most beautiful form, the Holy *Mass,* which is the very centre of Catholic worship.

1. In compliance with the regulations of the Church we all keep a record of our Mass intentions. Perhaps one or the other of us has at some time or other turned back the pages of this book, to his first Mass. What a sermon does not this unpretentious booklet, filled with dates and figures, preach to us! There you have the highest manifestation of God's love for your soul, recorded day by day; you are the chronicler of your own service at the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It almost frightens one to go through that endless array of entries and see how the days and the years came and went, but *"Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula"* (Hebr. XIII, 8). Presently these written characters intone a wondrous hymn of the ways of the Lord and His mercies. How bountifully have we partaken of the Holy Eucharist! But likewise what a weight of responsibility have we assumed! How have those Masses differed as regards your own devotion and disposition! At the head of the list there is the first, and the second, and many more full of unction, full of the first love, *"sicut dies verni"* (Eccli. L, 8). Would that there were no *decrescendo,* no wilting and withering from autumnal blasts! How terrible if God's eye or your own conscience would detect among the Masses one that should have been entered as *sacrilegium!* Or if, worse still, this pest has perhaps infested a whole series of Masses! It is a dreadful and uncanny thing

to find oneself driven into further hostility to God by the very Masses that span the celestial rainbow of peace between Heaven and earth. Unhappy the sinful priest who approaches the altar and says: *"ut puris mereamur mentibus introire,"* or *"in innocentia mea ingressus sum"!* Is not his every word a lie, his every genuflection an act of hypocrisy, his striking of the breast a contemptible pose? Should not every kiss he gives the altar remind him of the kiss of Judas? And the hand upon the holy table, consecrated indeed, but befouled,—should it not remind him of the Master's utterance concerning Judas: *"Ecce, manus tradentis me mecum est in mensa"* (Luke XXII, 21)? No wonder the Saints pronounce woe upon him who converts the *sacrificium* into a *sacrilegium,* the *mysterium* into a *parricidium,* life into death. It is an echo of the woe that befell Judas the traitor (Matth. XXVI, 24). And if a priest dared to throw a veil over the dismal secret of a sacrilegious Mass, God will one day bring it to light; the very altars will reveal it! "Thou hast acted in secret, but I will make it known." Though the sacrilege remains hidden on earth, every unworthy Mass proclaims itself aloud in the choir of Angels: "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and ye gates thereof, be very desolate" (Jer. II, 12).

Let us be careful to avoid this abyss, my brethren! Weekly confession will prove a great help. It is one of the principal safeguards of the priest. Much help, too, is afforded by the spirit of meditation and by prayer, especially prayer for chastity. When we are

bidden to add an oration *pro libitu,* let us from time to time choose the *"Oratio ad Postulandam Continentiam,"* in which we expressly ask God to give us continency, *"ut sacrificare tibi . . . absoluta libertate ac munda mente possimus."* What a sure preventive against sacrileges, furthermore, is constant employment, especially intellectual occupation with a science that supplies the soul with noble and pure concepts, or vocational work that involves physical exertion and fatigue. How important is temperance in the use of intoxicants, and obedience to the *canones de vita et honestate clericorum,* which the Church has erected as a strong breastwork about the life of the priest!

2. But we will go back to the pages of our Mass intentions record and let its fading leaves tell us more. Your conscience, I trust, absolves you from the dreadful sin of unworthy celebration; but do not some of those Masses deserve to be placed on the fatal divide between worthy and unworthy? Masses that are now defective, now somewhat better, but never entirely good? Are there not priests whose accounts show a long list of such Masses? How often have they reproached themselves for this lukewarmness, yet they keep on. *"Vita in dolore suspirat, et in opere non emendatur."* (*Or. Urbani VIII*). This is the reason why they derive so little fruit from offering the holy Sacrifice, why they remain the same after hundreds of Masses. "Who can treat this awful solemnity with carelessness, unless he be out of his mind

or altogether beside himself?" asks St. Chrysostom.[5] How can a priest, whilst continuing to celebrate Mass, become ever more indifferent towards the tremendous sacrifice? Wholly surrounded by the magnificence of the sacred mysteries, in the midst of all the beautiful thoughts and sentiments which the liturgy spreads out before him, how can his eye see nothing but dispiriting monotony?

Not long ago I had occasion to view "The Last Supper" by that notorious painter, Fritz von Uhde. The color-scheme, the table-cloth, the garments, all were unbecomingly poor; but in the faces of Our Lord and His Apostles there seemed to be something akin to piety and feeling. If such a painter, who claims to sketch from life, should happen to visit our Catholic churches and witness the renewal of the Last Supper, what would he find? Perhaps a poor table-cloth upon the altar, threadbare vestments, and a dismal setting for the whole. That might suit him for his painting; but if he beheld also the indifferent, expressionless countenance and the indefinable manners of a distracted celebrant, perhaps the whole scene might seem too wretched even for a Fritz von Uhde. Or, on the other hand, fancy a church in which everything is exquisite and costly: the linens immaculate, the laces delicate, the vestments of gold, the pictures and statues devout, the stained-glass windows full of splendor,—but within the church, at the altar, a priest whose heart is nearly dead, with nothing turning to the light, nothing germinating or sprouting with supernatural life:

[5] *De Sacerd.*, III, 4; ed. Montfaucon, I, 468.

—would not that be a scene to weep over? Has this priest been ordained to say Mass in such unworthy fashion? Is this what the Saviour meant when He said by the mouth of the bishop: *"Accipe potestatem missas offerre pro vivis et defunctis in nomine Domini, Amen"?* Is celebrating the Mass in this wise an echo of the heartbeat of Jesus as He offered up the first Mass in the Cenacle? What good are our Masses to us if they but drive us deeper into Purgatory?

3. Human weakness is apt gradually to diminish our fervor in saying Holy Mass, so that, if we are not careful, the proverb *"quotidiana vilescunt"* becomes applicable also to this great mystery. This is a danger which every priest, even the best, must keep in mind. If our Masses have heretofore been in any way defective, then let us say to ourselves: There must be a change as long as there is time! *"Dixi, nunc coepi"* (Ps. LXXVI, 11). I will begin anew! This resolution requires no superhuman effort, nothing that we cannot do with God's grace. With some the whole secret lies in revising the order of the day, always rising in time to make the meditation and prepare for Mass.

Of the different methods of preparing for Mass one of the best is that recommended to us by the Church herself, namely, the so-called *Accessus,* found in the Missal and Breviary. Some priests do not value those splendid Psalms and prayers sufficiently. There is an indulgence of one year for reciting these prayers before and after Mass, and a plenary indulgence once a

month if they are said every day. We should use them, if for no other motive than to gain the indulgences, for who has greater need of indulgences than the priest? Those Psalms express in the most beautiful manner acts of faith, desire, humility, and confidence. They are like the solemn notes of a harp, introducing the sacrifice, and awakening corresponding chords in the soul. Is not this prayer, which is inspired by the Holy Ghost, better than any private prayer? Reading through the *missa* of the day before going to the altar, is also a good preparation. St. Joseph Calasanctius followed this practice from his first Mass to his 92nd year; often he would read the *missa* three times. So did others, *e.g.*, St. Joseph of Cupertino.

Every Mass formula is a work of art, filled with sublime ideas, sacred sentiments, and Scripture texts in the literal and accommodative sense. Its component parts oftentimes are separated by two thousand years; perhaps five or six authors have worked at it; yet every part fits into every other as if the whole had been cast in a single mold. In every Mass the truly Catholic character of our religion, which encompasses all times and the whole world, manifests itself, and if one is fond of broad vistas and large horizons, the Mass offers a very attractive study.

The *Introitus* alone often affords matter for a whole meditation. It strikes the distinguishing chord of the *missa*:—now joyous, now serious and plaintive, now devoutly beseeching, now solemn as the blasts of a trumpet. And what an adequate expression, liturgical

and ascetical, does not the Introit find in the melodies of the Gregorian Chant!

The *Collect* contains a gold-mine that is all too little known and exploited. A certain bishop of our day says that dogmatic and moral theology meet in these prayers. The Collect is a brief summary of the day's liturgy. In it meditation, lesson, and psalmody for the day's feast find their well-defined kernel, a résumé of the entire Office, characterized by precision and poetic beauty. Nothing in these prayers is sacrificed to mere style; every word is exactly to the point. The method invariably observed is this: first comes an exposition of the object of the feast or holyday; then the petition; lastly the grand finale, *"per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum,"* etc. These prayers are so simple that everyone can understand them; so brief that they never weary; easily memorized (for they often have a sort of rhythm), and very rich and full. Not a few of them bear the impress of centuries. Many originated in the ancient Sacramentaries of Gelasius, St. Ambrose, and St. Gregory the Great; the shorter they are, the older. The *"A cunctis"* is the work of that great Pope, Innocent III. The Church alone can make Collects, for she alone knows how to speak to God, she alone is acquainted, as it were, with the ways of His Heart. If you are looking for beautiful prayers, here they are,—*tolle, lege.* The Collects, be it noted, are also a rich thesaurus of thoughts for sermons.

The *Epistles* and *Gospels* pour out upon us streams of divine truth and wisdom. In the daily Sacrifice

of the Mass they flow uninterruptedly through the garden of the Church, and no persecution, no antagonism, no philosophy, no earthly power, can dry them up. Daily we stand by these streams of living water; ought we not to drink copiously therefrom by means of thorough meditation?

Then there are in the Mass some prayers of a lyric nature, such as the *Kyrie,* the *Gloria,* and the *Gradual,* which, like a fresh breeze, enkindle the fire of devotion in us.

The *Preface* carries us high above the earth, and its sublime conclusion bears us upward, as upon Angels' wings, to the throne of the Blessed Trinity. *"Cum Angelis et Archangelis, cum Thronis et Dominationibus,"* we are lifted ever higher by the wave of prayer, till at last it completely inundates us in the thrice "Holy."

The *Canon* is the Holy of Holies in the liturgy of the Mass. In it all is grand and sublime, yet touchingly simple. No flight of fancy here, no rhythm, no beautiful imagery, such as we often meet with in the Epistles, Introits, and Graduals; nothing but a grandiose simplicity; the Divine Mystery alone predominates. At the beginning of the Canon we approach the eternal Father, the *principium sine principio,* and, in passing, pronounce the name of Pope and Bishop. Then comes the *"Communicantes."* What a wonderful communion, what overwhelming characters pass before us:—first, the most holy Virgin (*"imprimis gloriosæ semper Virginis Mariæ"*), then, the most august college of the world, the holy Apostles; finally, the revered Martyrs of the Infant Church. How touching, how

consoling, to belong to such a glorious Communion of Saints!

The *Consecration* is the climax of the sacred drama, the summary and rendezvous of all miracles (Suarez). It is surrounded by a rite that could hardly be simpler, yet a world of thought and emotion underlies these mute gestures of elevation and genuflection. Who knows what we should invent to make the Consecration solemn, if it were left to us? It is well that the Church with her supernatural tact has directed us what to do. There is nothing more appropriate or more eloquent than the rite of Consecration in its simple grandeur.

If we fail to say the *Pater noster* devoutly in holy Mass, when shall we ever say it devoutly? How solemn do those unfathomable petitions: *"Sanctificetur nomen tuum," "Adveniat regnum tuum,"* and all the rest sound amid these surroundings! How touching the words, *"pacem in diebus nostris,"* which we pray standing on our Thabor, as it were, whilst the storm of ages is howling without!

The *three orations before Holy Communion* are extremely tender and sincere. In the first we feel the breath of heavenly peace. We remind the Lord of His great promise (John XIV, 27): "Peace I leave you, My peace I give to you." Listen, it is not the peace of an angel or an archangel which He promises to give us, but His own peace,—the peace of the Son of God, wherein He Himself lives and moves, *"cuius ipsa natura pax est."* [6] What priest does not feel glad when he pronounces these words, bowed down over the

[6] St. Ambrose, *In Ep. ad Philipp.*, c. 4, v. 8–9; Migne, 17, 442.

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fountain of consolation that bubbles up from the depths of the Divinity and comforts our weary, struggling souls? In the other two orations we lay before our Saviour our greatest needs: *"tuis semper inhaerere mandatis,—a te nunquam separari permittas,—non mihi proveniat in iudicium."* How touchingly beautiful are these petitions in their childlike simplicity! How can any priest find it in his heart to hurry through these wonderful prayers?

Before receiving Holy Communion, we bless ourselves with the sacred Host and the Chalice. That is a benediction of the Blessed Sacrament exclusively reserved for the priest. Before entering His living temple the Saviour blesses it with a blessing that is rich and enduring. *"Corpus Domini nostri Iesu Christi custodiat,"* we pray;—may His sacred Body protect my soul, which is consecrated to Him, and preserve it unto life everlasting!

Then we receive Holy Communion under both species. It is a privilege which many of the faithful laity envy us. *"Communio"* means union with the Godhead. That is the end and purpose of all religion. How close to God does not the Mass bring us! See the priest:—at the commencement of the Mass he stood at the altar-step, bowed low; now he stands high up in the centre of the altar, united with the Divinity and the sacred Humanity of Jesus,—with the flesh and blood of the Saviour. *"O res mirabilis!"*

The *priestly blessing* given at the end of the Mass is a ceremony pregnant with truth and poetry. Kissing the altar, extending the hands heavenward, turning to

the people a face but just immersed in the sacred mysteries, pronouncing the *Benedicat* with the sign of the cross;—what could be more beautiful? The priest bestows his blessing upon all,—upon those that are devoted to him as well as those who hate or dislike him, *"maledicimur et benedicimus"* (1 Cor. IV, 12). To bless is the priest's revenge; but *benedicere* is *benefacere*. Let us consider well what we do and say at this last moment of the Mass.

The *Gospel of St. John* is a conclusion worthy of the Mass. The eternal and temporal history of Jesus Christ once more passes before us in monumental sentences, ending in the words: *"plenum gratiae et veritatis."* It is a full and tranquillizing conclusion *gratia et veritas,* words doubly dear to us in view of the desperation and scepticism that yawn upon us from every side.

May I call your attention to the official *Prayers after Mass,* ordered by the Holy See? They should be said kneeling at the foot of the altar after the last Gospel. First, the three Hail Marys. The eulogies pronounced by the Saints on the *Ave Maria* are noteworthy. They say it is the most beautiful and most blessed of prayers after the Our Father. They call it the sweet melody of the predestined, the priceless pearl, the purple rose which we offer to Mary; and they say that whoever is not touched by the dew of this prayer, will remain unproductive. A delightful attempt to exhaust the depths of the *Ave Maria* is the *Speculum B. M. V.,* attributed to St. Bonaventure.

The *Salve Regina* is the grandest of the antiphons

composed in honor of Our Lady. It brings to our minds first the idea of a Queen, then that of a Mother, then "God's mercy as it appears in feminine form" (Suso). There is the picture of human misery, the cry of human distress, and looking down upon all is the Virgin Mother. *"Misericordes oculos;"* how benign the expression that beams from those maternal eyes! In conclusion we are shown an engaging picture: the Mother with her Heavenly Child.

Then follow the two prayers. We must recite them often and should do so understandingly. They are full of weighty thoughts. Once more the soul of the priest turns to the Lord of creation and hails Him as "our refuge and strength." This prayer is of recent origin, but the *"refugium"* is very old and comes to us from the far-off desert. The expression once burst from a noble soul in the midst of an awful catastrophe. It was Moses, who saw his people falling dead day after day in the desert; amid this frightful mortality he raised his eyes to the eternal, immutable God, and exclaimed: *"Refugium factus es nobis a generatione in generationem"* (Ps. LXXXIX, 1). Round about us, too, there is mortality, physical and spiritual death from the plague of false systems, from the poison cups of Babylon (Jer. LI, 7) that are poured out over the present generation. Add to this the scorching wind of the desert, heresy, unbelief, Socialism: where shall we find safety? The Holy Father points aloft: *"Deus refugium nostrum et virtus."* That is the right word. *"Populum tuum."* Thy people; we, the Christians of to-day, our parishes, are His people, His

family; the Christian Church is but a colony of the heavenly motherland, whence she was founded. *"Ad te clamantem,"* in the whirlwind of the times this is not a prayer that we whisper, but a loud cry of distress that rises to Heaven. "Truly the magnitude of the need forces from us a piercing cry." [7] *"Propitius respice,"*—what a picture! God, from His abode of eternal peace looks mercifully down upon His people. *"Intercedentibus."* The mighty advocates, the ever-ready helpers of the Militant Church, the Saints of God, foremost among them Mary, Joseph, the patron of the universal Church, Peter, the great Apostle, who governs all Christian ages through his successors, Paul, the bulwark of the Church, "and all the Saints," are our intercessors and protectors.

Presently our thoughts turn away from the heavenly Jerusalem and revert to the earth; but what sad conditions meet us here! We pray "for the conversion of sinners." The life of sin throughout the world is incalcuable and unfathomable. We pray *"pro conversione peccatorum,"* including particularly those whom we know, and for whom we are bound to pray. What miracles we demand of God! "For the liberty and exaltation" of the Church against her enemies, who are trying to suppress and shackle her in politics, in science, in literature, in the family life. She is our mother, the queen of humanity, and her enemies have clothed her in the garb of degradation, hung about her the mantle of derision; this we ask God to ameliorate.

The final prayer to St. Michael places before us some

[7] St. Bernard, *In Ps. Qui habitat,* Sermo 16, 2.

striking contrasts. On the one side we see the demons emanating from the abyss and overrunning the earth,—the demons of pride, the demons of lust, and all the rest; on the other side St. Michael, the Prince of the heavenly host, the illustrious champion in the prehistoric battle of the spirits against God, the first of all apostasies. There is a hint of this Archangel's mysterious conflict with Satan at the grave of Moses, which the famous passage in the Letter of St. Jude (v. 9) veils rather than explains. At the end we urgently request him to thrust into hell Satan with his hordes of evil spirits, who go about the world seeking to destroy souls. It is an oration full of the noise of battle, full of the clash of spiritual arms, bearing the impress of our own time and its gigantic struggle for and against God. Ought not the heart of the priest, who is a captain in the Church Militant, beat more courageously when he recites this martial oration with his people? And ought not this battle-cry of the fighting Church reach Heaven and draw down succor through the power of united prayer? "This force is pleasing to God," says Tertullian [8] and elsewhere: [9] "The prayer of the righteous turns aside the wrath of God, it guards against the enemy and makes supplication for the persecutors. Prayer alone vanquishes God."

Thus we see that a liturgical meditation on the Mass is really worth while. From the *"Introibo"* to the last word, all is majesty and charm. The liturgy

[8] *Apolog.*, c. 39; Migne 1, 468.
[9] *De Orat., cap. ult.;* Migne 1, 1195.

of the Mass is a worthy setting for the diamond which it encloses, and a powerful aid to priestly piety during holy Mass. Having once tasted these sweets, who would rush through these delightful fields like a hurricane, instead of walking deliberately, with appreciation and rapture, through this garden of the Holy Ghost? Properly employed, the half hour devoted to the Mass would become for the priest the happiest period of the day, a spiritual banquet without compare, a daily event of great efficacy and blessed consequences alike for priest and parish. The magnificent prayers of the Mass would be wafted like aromatic odors about the holy mountain, infusing joy and courage and the youthful vigor of Saints into our hearts, so that every Mass we say would have something of the fragrance of our first Mass, thus enabling us to pray at our last Mass with the same conviction as at our first: *"Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat iuventutem meam."*

SECOND CONFERENCE

THE BREVIARY—MEDITATION—HOLY SCRIPTURE

I. Let us now take up the recitation of the *Breviary*. We shall try to be brief about it, although the fullness of the subject almost precludes brevity.

1. We will begin by stating a truth universally recognized in the Catholic Church. *"Oportet orare":* all men must pray. He who does not know this, knows nothing about life and history. *"Oportet semper orare et non deficere"* (Luke XVIII, 1): we must pray always, pray incessantly, pray much and long. The Church is well aware of this. She knows particularly that the priest must pray without ceasing if he wishes to live up to the ideal of his high office, if his soul is not to become a barren desert. This need of constant and fervent prayer is not merely recognized by the Church in theory, but put into daily, nay, hourly practice. She has introduced an *Officium Nocturnum* and an *Officium, Diurnum,* and made its recitation a duty of the strictest obligation, thus making sure that the exhortation of Our Lord, *"oportet semper orare,"* is faithfully lived up to by His spouse until the end of time.

2. But it is not only necessary to pray; we must

also employ correct *forms of prayer.* The creature must speak to its Creator in the proper way. *"Sic vos orabitis,"* said our Lord (Matth. VI, 9), when He inculcated the Our Father. The Church has given us a model in the Divine Office. This prayer is to a large extent inspired by the Holy Ghost and takes into due account, not only the proper attitude of the creature towards God, the majesty of God, and the sinfulness of man, but also God's goodness and mercy, man's filial relation to Him, the dignity of his nature, and his exalted destiny. The Office is, therefore, a prayer which combines the deepest reverence, childlike fervor, and humble confidence with compunction and blessed hope. It is a prayer full of rapture, full of nobility and poetic sentiment. No prayer is pleasing to God that is not founded on truth, *i. e.,* on the teachings of Catholic dogma and morals. Now the Divine Office *is* such a prayer. It clearly reflects the sublime dogmatic truths concerning the Triune God, creation, man's original state, the fall, the Redemption, Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Church, the Sacraments, the Last Judgment. It reflects the correct teaching in regard to the last end of man, conscience, the commandments, the counsels, virtue, virginity, martyrdom, etc. Ecclesiastical law and discipline and the history of the Church have likewise put their stamp on this prayer-book, which in its essential portions is more than fifteen centuries old. We find in it the glorious traces of the Primitive Church as well as of the most recent events, of the Nicene Council, of the Council of Trent, of the *Theotokos* of the Council of Ephesus, of

the Immaculate Conception of 1854, Mary of the Snow and Mary of Lourdes, St. Peter and Leo XIII, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, Constantine the Great and Charlemagne, Arius and Luther.

What a wealth of scenery is displayed in the seasons and feasts of the ecclesiastical year! What beautiful shades of devotion in the various mysteries celebrated! Now we journey through the twilight of Advent and hear the prophetic song of the Old Testament; then we find ourselves in the radiant glory of the liturgy of Pentecost; now we greet the Christ Child in the manger; then we see the Man of Sorrows on the Cross; now we behold the Great Judge coming in the clouds of heaven; then the beautiful moon of the church-year, the Blessed Virgin Mary, beams upon us, and anon the Apostolic spirit wafts over us. To-day we see the hierarchy of the Church, the *corona praesulum,* gathered about the Saviour in the *Commune Pontificum,* and to-morrow, on the feast of the Holy Martyrs, we wander about in the rose-garden of the Church; now in the lily-garden on the feast of virgins, and again in the sanctuary of the Christian family on the feast of holy women, strong of mind, mild of manner, wise and modest. At times we traverse the deserts of the Orient or the palm groves of Egypt, and anon we find ourselves in some metropolis of Europe, or in China, India, or Africa. Yesterday we were in some seat of learning, to-day we are in a convent cell, and to-morrow we shall hold intercourse with shepherds in the country. Thus the Breviary illustrates the universal character of the Church in a wonderful way.

3. How does the recitation of the Breviary affect the Church and the world? Let us not underestimate its *effects.* There are priests who try to get through with their Office as quickly as possible because it seems a burden to them. They place a higher value upon almost any other prayer and occupation. This is a serious mistake. Some day we shall learn how much evil the Breviary prevented in the parish, how many dangers it averted, how much of the sacred dew of this prayer fell upon the souls of the tempted, the sick, the dying, the dead. Verily, the daily recitation of the Holy Office by so many priests through the centuries must affect the world's history, accelerating or retarding events, but always unto the salvation of men. It is a mighty power with which the world would do well to reckon. We priests especially should reckon with it in our pastoral labors and cast our Office as a weight into the scales, *pro* and *contra. Pro*—for all that is good, for every child we baptize and every aged person we bury, for every soul whose salvation and progress we are responsible for in conscience. *Contra* —against Satan, who prowls about in even the most distant village, who sneaks through our homes, factories, and barns, in forests and fields, about the bathing-places and soldiers' quarters, everywhere, *"quaerens quem devoret"* (1 Pet. V, 8). *Contra*— against all the enemies and opponents of God's Kingdom in the parish, whether they be in the city hall or in the shepherd's hut, at home or abroad. In every Catholic congregation the work of the pastor is opposed by the same adversaries as in the world at large.

The same opposing banners are unfurled in every parish, the standard of Jesus Christ on the one side, and that of the devil on the other. And everywhere the weapon of defense is the same,—prayer, above all the *Officium Divinum*. A single devout *hora* does more damage to the enemy and averts more harm from souls than a dozen passionate, vitriolic denunciations hurled from the pulpit.

4. What St. Ambrose says of the "Sweet Book of Psalms" may be truly said of the entire Breviary, for it is compiled mostly from the Psalter. "The people's blessing consists in the praise of God, the melodious profession of faith, the full fervor of those in authority, . . . the spiritual sacrifice." [1] Yes, to the one who recites the Breviary it may sometimes seem a sacrifice, but let us gladly make this offering to the Lord; He will richly repay it. What a consolation it will be in the hour of death to be able to say: I have spent so and so many hours of my life in communion with God! Of course, there were amongst these hours some spoilt by aridity and barrenness; but I overcame them for the sake of Him that hath loved us (Rom. VIII, 37). Even if we experienced no elevation of spirit and had nothing but our good will to lay at the feet of the Most High, our prayers would not be fruitless, our labor would not be vain. "Before our prayer has gone forth from our mouth, the Son of God has ordered it to be entered in His book." [2] Let us thank God for having given us the

[1] *Enarr. in Ps.*, I, n. 4. 9; Migne, 14, 966 ff.
[2] St. Bernard, *In Quadrag.*, Sermo 5, 5.

Breviary as a life companion, which should become more indispensable to us every day. The seals of this book are not hard to open, especially if we will study the Psalms.

5. All liturgical books deserve our highest esteem: the *Rituale,* the *Benedictionale,* and especially the *Pontificale.* The same spirit which governs Holy Scripture dominates the sacred liturgy. There is embodied in it so much acuteness of intellect, such depth of sentiment, so much unction, so much nobility, tenderness, and rapture, such immense and manifold wealth, that, like Holy Scripture, it never ages, and repays loving study in every detail.

If you study secular literature, especially that of to-day, you will be glad to return to the sacred liturgy and appreciate its truth, beauty, and depth all the more.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the liturgy was held in high esteem and widely practiced in monasteries. But the following generations handled this venerable heritage with little respect. Many who did so knew no better, and have probably long since learned to appreciate the ancient liturgy more adequately and are now joyfully taking part in the liturgy of Heaven. For us a better era has dawned, but the wonderful richness of the sacred liturgy has not yet been sufficiently exploited, neither in our prayer books, nor in our sermons and catechetical instructions. Let us learn to know and use these treasures, so that we may atone for the carelessness of past generations!

II. And now permit me to speak to you briefly but urgently on interior prayer, *i. e., meditation.* The habitual omission of meditation entails an awful loss (*lucrum cessans*). Whole kingdoms of grace, illumination, understanding, and joy escape us if we fail to meditate. Continuous meditation increases the taste for interior prayer, makes us relish the splendor and beauty of our holy religion, and unfolds before us in an irresistible manner the glorious harmony of the divine works. How imprudent is the priest who does not meditate! He lets others launch out into the deep to fish for precious pearls, he yields to others the happiness of enjoying these treasures, whilst he himself lies supinely upon the dunes and contents himself with a few grains of sand. That is the *lucrum cessans* to which I just referred.

There is also a *damnum emergens,* a sort of spiritual consumption, resulting in prayer without warmth and strength, sermons that have a hollow sound, exhortations in the confessional that are cold and unimpressive. When a gust of temptation comes, it will upset the powerless weakling, and his fall will be terrible. One does not have to listen half an hour to a priest preaching in order to ascertain whether or not he has the spirit of meditation; sometimes a few minutes' exhortation in the confessional will enable one to distinguish between a deep reservoir and a leaky cistern (St. Bernard).

And then the daily examination of conscience, the daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament,—in a word, *order* in the priestly life. If a priest dawdles along

haphazardly, the absence of order is apt to prey like a cancer upon his whole spiritual life. He is easily discouraged and tempted to give up the struggle for order and discipline, feeling that the goal is unattainable. But that is a mistake on his part. God always gives us grace in abundance. Do not say: "I cannot," but rather: "I will." You can if you will but make an earnest effort.

III. So far we have spoken of prayer as the chief requisite of the interior and exterior life of the priest. We will now take up the second. *"Pascas verbo,"* St. Bernard exhorts us, indicating the second important branch of Apostolic activity. *"Nos orationi et ministerio verbi instantes erimus,"* said the Apostles (Acts VI, 4). Spiritual writers call the Apostolic office *"ministerium verbi."* What kind of a word do they mean? It is the *word of God,* which we preach. And what is its principal source? Holy Scripture. Speaking, therefore, of the word and the preaching of it, I place before all else the priest's relation to *Holy Scripture.*

Pope Leo XIII[3] gave the Church an extensive encyclical on Holy Scripture. It is primarily addressed to the clergy, "to those whom divine grace has called to the sacred order," as he himself put it. Now if we should have an attentive ear for every sound emanating from the *cathedra Petri,* this "great trumpet of truth," then a declaration so significant as the encyclical

[3] *Litterae Encyclicae de Studiis Scripturae Sacrae* (*"Providentissimus Deus"*), Nov. 18, 1893.

"Providentissimus Deus" ought to furnish us with a guide for our views and actions. Let us take from the encyclical what directly applies to the care of souls.

In speaking as he does of the preëminence and dignity of the Scriptures, Leo XIII merely echoes the admiration exhibited at all times by the Church for the Holy Bible. No one who has the least understanding for the works of God here below, can refuse to share this love and admiration for Holy Writ.

Reading and using the Scripture need not mean collecting passages from it for sermons. Our chief aim should be to enter into the spirit of the Bible and to enrich our souls with its treasures. I will, therefore, first answer the question: What is Holy Scripture to us? and then: How can it help us in our sermons?

1. The Holy Father directs our attention to the *"rich treasure of heavenly doctrine"* (Chrysostom, Augustine) which the priest can gain from Holy Scripture. It is God, the *prima veritas,* the Supreme Good, the infinitely Great One, who reveals Himself, His thoughts, His plans, and His works through Holy Writ. The firmament under which we walk when we enter this vast realm, extends from Adam to Christ, from the Prophets to the Evangelists. I can find there everything,—my origin, the way I am to travel, my final destiny; the past, the future, the beginnings of the Kingdom of God in Paradise unto the mysterious last things of man, from the first heaven and the first earth in Genesis to the new earth and the new heaven

of the Apocalypse (XXI, 1), from the creation to the consummation of the world. It is especially the greatness of God, His majesty, the magnificent and wonderful connection between all His works, that are spread before us. By the prayerful study of Sacred Scripture we can acquire that breadth of vision, sublimity of ideas, and loftiness of view-point peculiar to the saints.

The Holy Father then points to the rich gain in the *knowledge of Christ* to be derived from Holy Writ. *"Ignoratio Scripturarum ignoratio Christi."* [4] We know that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of all things. *"Christum bibere"* was the chief fruit that the Fathers of the Church derived from the Scriptures. St. Ambrose says: *"In utroque [Testamento] Christum bibis."* [5] What an attractive subject for a priest is the study of Christ as portrayed by the figures, types, and prophecies of the Old Testament! Once these figures were mysterious and dark; to us they are transparent in the light of the New Testament. And then the study of Christ in the Gospels and Epistles! What a lifelike picture, *"veluti viva et spirans imago eius,"* as Leo XIII beautifully says. Is it not a source of delight to gaze upon the charming portrait of Christ sketched by the Evangelists, by Peter, Paul, and John, who knew him so well?

[4] Hieronymus, *In Ies. Prol.*

[5] *"Bibe primum Vetus Testamentum, ut bibas Novum Testamentum. Bibe primum, ut sitim mitiges; bibe secundum, ut bibendi satietatem haurias. Utrumque ergo poculum bibe, Veteris et Novi Testamenti, quia in utroque Christum bibis. Bibitur Scriptura divina et devoratur Scriptura divina, cum in venas mentis ac vires animae succus verbi descendit aeterni."* (*I, Ps.*, I, n. 33; Migne, 14, 983 f.)

Furthermore, Holy Writ, especially the Epistles of St. Paul, gives us a deep insight into the mystery of the Church, her duration and glory in this world, as prefigured in the Psalms and by Isaias.

Where do we find such lofty views regarding *man,* his original dignity, his fall into sin, his restoration in Christ, as in the Scriptures? What anthropological treasures are disclosed to us there, and what a revelation of the human heart!

Nowhere do we find such a pure and holy moral teaching as in Holy Scripture, "instructions replete with sanctity, exhortations seasoned with sweetness and vigor." Here we have glorious examples of every kind of virtue (*"exempla in omni genere virtutum insignia"*). The priest especially can find here models a-plenty. When we contemplate the great heroic figures of the Bible, is it not like walking through an ancestral hall, where noble images look down upon us and tell us what these heroes did and suffered for Christ? The concluding chapters of Ecclesiasticus (XLIV ff.) open up to us a magnificent gallery of this kind, and many more have been added, so that the priest who walks daily in this venerable hall, can fill himself with the spirit of "the former prophets" (XXXVI, 17). These holy men of God are heroes of fidelity, of penance, full of courage and hope, hot-headed or strong and gentle, full of love, of God-given power; both men and women, spiritually tall like the palms of the Orient. If I were permitted to point out an individual, I should name Moses. Every pastor is a Moses in his congregation, a leader on the journey to

the Promised Land. Here as there we see the pastoral office with its great aims and problems, its unavoidable sufferings. How often do the conditions that existed among the people of Israel find their counterpart in our parishes: dissatisfaction, murmuring, insubordination, rebellion, showers of manna, the golden calf, and scenes of indecency! You can easily see what it means to save souls, and why the priest in the end has to die lonely, like Moses. Or take Saul. His call and selection, his infidelity, his terrible fate, stand before us in flaming characters, warning us what it means to have received from God a high calling, and to become unfaithful to it.

Holy Scripture as a *school of sanctity* for the priest would furnish material for another chapter. Among the multitude of ascetic books at our disposal, Holy Scripture, which is a veritable gold-mine of asceticism, is appreciated far too little. Here is precious, unalloyed gold,—knowledge of God, of human nature, of the ways of God and the ways of man. The ascetic treatises written by holy men are only a streamlet trickling from the great river of living water contained in Sacred Scripture. Why do we not drink more copiously from this fountain? How devout would our morning prayers be if we were animated by the belief of Job and of the Psalmist in the sublimity of God and our utter dependence on Him? How thorough and contrite would be our examination of conscience if it were inspired by the biblical idea of God's justice and the enormity of sin! How utterly impossible would a sacrilegious Mass be to a priest in whose ears

continuously resounded the thunders of Scripture concerning judgment and hell!

It is quite unnecessary for me to speak of the Bible as the great *book of prayer,* in which every kind of prayer has its model; for the Church has embodied almost the entire treasure of biblical prayers in her liturgy.

But let me say a word or two about Holy Scripture as the unerring compass directing us *in all great questions of policy that arise both in the world and in the Church.* Holy Scripture incessantly points to God as the supreme Master of the destinies of nations and states, and particularly as the Guide and Protector of His special work on earth, the Church, the visible Kingdom of God. Listening to the speeches of statesmen and parliamentarians we might sometimes be tempted to think that they can do what they please. Sacred Scripture shows that nothing can happen but what God wills. Whatever His friends or enemies do on earth, is merely the woof of the fabric which He holds in His hand. When we read in the newspapers about parties and political combinations, we see only the narrow human element in politics. But if we open Sacred Scripture, we discover the divine element, which is the higher and the decisive factor. We see how in olden times God influenced politics in Egypt, Ninive, Babylon, etc., and are assured that He will again play a decisive rôle in the last days of the world. We often see how iniquity flourishes, but never triumphs, because God is against it; justice is often defeated, yet in the end always comes to the top,

because God supports it. Such is the world-control exercised by Divine Providence. How much tranquillity and confidence ought not this thought afford us in the present-day conflicts which cause so much injury to religion and the Church! *"Dominus subsannavit eos, meditati sunt inania"* (Ps. II, 4. 1),—words like these are worth more than a hundred editorials. We need not look anxiously into the future, for Holy Scripture assures us: *"Desiderium peccatorum peribit"* (Ps. CXI, 10). That is God's judgment of the future. When we ask: Whither shall these anti-Christian tendencies lead?—the answer is: *Non praevalebunt"* (Matth. XVI, 18). In this prognosis is contained the whole future of the Church. Oh, let us ever apply the criterion of the Bible to all human institutions!

In the Holy Scriptures, moreover, we always see emphasis laid on God's infallible *authority.* In the writings of our own time we meet with such expressions as: "We believe, we opine, it seems that," etc. When we read: *"Haec dicit Dominus,"* or, *"Dixit Iesus ad discipulos suos,"* we know it is the utterance of absolute Truth, as opposed to subjective assertions, the *commenta opinionum,* as Leo XIII so well terms them, which are subject to error and have no permanent value.

I will say nothing of the *estheticism* and *poetry* of the Bible. In this respect, too, it carries off the palm among books, and Leo XIII justly compares it, in the words of two Church Fathers (SS. Augustine and Ambrose), to "fertile meadows and paradisic fields, where the Lord's flock finds wonderful pasture and solace."

You see, therefore, how many reasons impel us to make Holy Scripture our favorite book, as St. Augustine did! At first he had no very high opinion of it (*Confess.,* III, 5); but when grace had opened his eyes, he saw in it the fountain of profoundest thought, and it became a source of joy to his heart and the mainspring of his priestly conduct. If every priest would absorb the strength and sweetness of the Word of God from Holy Writ, of what service could we not be to our fellowmen! How effectively could we not fulfill the duty of dispensing the word of God if we kept in close contact with the Bible! Let us for a moment consider Holy Scripture in its relation to the preaching office.

2. Holy Writ gives the preacher *authority* (*"oratori sacro auctoritatem addit"*). One can often read this in the eyes and expression of the listeners. Sacred Scripture also gives, says Leo XIII, an Apostolic *frankness* of speech (*"apostolicam dicendi libertatem"*). It knows no human respect; it speaks the truth, not in a whisper, but like a trumpet. It does not veil the facts, but calls good good, evil evil, sin sin, the devil devil and Herod a fox (Luke XIII, 32). It knows no diluted conception of morality, no empty philosophizing, no mere humanities, no abstract formulas, but *"nervosam, victricemque eloquentiam."* It penetrates sermons with the *fire* of the divine word, without becoming cold and weak in spite of brilliancy, like the discourses in some sermon books. It also gives *freshness* and *directness* to our preaching. Take, for

instance, the explanation of the Sunday Gospel, known as *homily*. Here Christ Himself appears before the congregation—not as a ghost from the remote past, but concretely, with His doctrine and divine deeds, with the gripping force of His utterances, with His striking imagery and the wonderful pathos that is spread over His parables. The people stood entranced when they heard His voice and felt the mighty magic of His personality. The same effect is produced today when a preacher places before his audience the living Christ, *"potens in opere et sermone"* (Luke XXIV, 19), and shows the wonderful adaptability of those ancient parables to our own time. The same hearts, the same human needs by which the Saviour was surrounded, now surround the preacher. Oh, if you understood this divine art of making the Gospel come to life, of gathering in your soul the spirit, the fire, the strength, the color of the divine word, and pouring it out over the souls of your hearers, you would be a true preacher by the grace of God! What a lot of sublime and new things you would have to say! For the most commonplace utterance has an exalted dignity when steeped in Holy Scripture. And even when we do not deliver a formal homily, but a simple sermon, the Bible should furnish the inspiration, not only by an occasional quotation, which is easily forgotten, but by exploiting the sacred text, elucidating, amplifying and applying it in such a way that Sacred Scripture furnishes the golden background from which our every thought stands out.

Permit me to point out to you the influence which the Bible should exercise upon our way of employing the emotions or affections in our sermons. Playing upon the affections successfully is not an easy matter. There is no better school of this art than the Bible. In its pages we may listen to the fulminations of eloquence and again to the tenderest effusions of feeling. What national calamities, what pictures of misery pass before us, and again what idyllic scenes!

Great also should be the influence of Holy Scripture on our homiletic *language* and *exposition.* Often a sermon is devoid of force, either because the preacher lacks imagination, or because he purposely attempts to set forth purely spiritual ideas. Holy Writ shows us another and a better way. The inspired word of God is always lively and attractive, both in the Gospels, with their inimitable simplicity, their sweet unction, and their innate grace, and in the Old Testament, with its splendid diction and its wealth of imagery. If we inject into our exposition something of the action, tone, and color of the Bible, the truth will penetrate more deeply into the souls of our hearers. Let us learn from the Bible how to express ourselves clearly and simply, how to repeat the same thought when necessary, how to adapt ourselves to the viewpoint of our hearers by borrowing pictures from ordinary life, but likewise to rise to the sublimest heights, if need be.

3. Therefore, my friend, read the Holy Scriptures daily for the sake of edification; first without com-

mentary or notes, and, having called on the Divine Spirit, let the sacred text impress itself fully upon you; then for scientific and homiletic study by the aid of good commentaries.

In our Breviary we have examples of the various methods of scriptural interpretation,—the sober exegesis of St. Jerome, the practical exposition of St. Gregory the Great, and the profound speculations of St. Augustine.

We may gain something from every homily, even if it be only a knowledge of the loving attention and thoroughness which the Fathers bestow upon Holy Scripture. Put away all other reading and take up *THE BOOK* (ἡ βίβλος)! Become in a certain sense "a man of one book." When you received the order of lector, the Church placed in your hands the book of Holy Scripture, with the promise of a glorious reward if you would properly administer the word of God to the people. The same ceremony was repeated at your ordination as a subdeacon and later as a deacon. Your life was thus placed under the aegis of the Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Scriptures. Carry out this intention of the Church by placing yourself in that relation to Holy Scripture in which the Church wishes to see you. It will surely be a great consolation to you at the hour of death if you have conformed to the mind of the Church also in this respect. *"Beatus vir, qui in lege Domini meditatur die ac nocte! Erit lignum quod plantatum est secus decursus aquarum, fructum suum dabit in tempore suo"* (Ps. I).

In these conferences we have so far considered the two main supports of priestly efficiency: *oratio* and *verbum;* we now come to the third, which is important enough to be treated in a separate conference; namely, *exemplum,* good example.

THIRD CONFERENCE

GOOD EXAMPLE

I. WHY are we priests obliged more than others to give a good example?

1. Because this is demanded by the very nature of the priesthood. The priest is called by God to lead men to virtue, and it is easy to see that, in order to lead others safely upon a road, he must walk that road himself. No doubt we can lead others by word of mouth; but we can do so far more effectively by example. *"Verbum sonat, exemplum tonat,"* or, as St. Bernard puts it: *"Validior operis quam oris vox."* [1]

Very early in our clerical career, the Church, in bestowing the lowest of the seven Orders, impressed on us with strong emphasis the duty of giving a good example. When we became *ostiarii,* we were told to open the hearts of the faithful to God and to close them to the devil by good example. We saw then that the cleric is considered not merely by himself, but with reference to the faithful, and that much is expected of

[1] *In Cantic.,* Sermo 59, 3. *"Studete etiam, ut sicut materialibus clavibus ecclesiam visibilem aperitis et clauditis, sic et invisibilem Dei domum, corda scilicet fidelium, dictis et exemplis vestris claudatis diabolo et aperiatis Deo."* (*Pontif., De Ordinat. Ostiar.*)

him in this regard—that a cleric may be an *ostiarius* of God or of Satan, granting admittance to God or to the devil, according to the example he gives to others. When ordaining us *lectores* [2] the Church again pointed to the hundreds and thousands who would see and hear us, and to whom we should give the example of a good life; she reminded us of the harmony that should exist between reading, believing, and living. Thus from the very beginning of our clerical career the Church sought to compel us with the logic of God, who wishes that the truth should display its effects in our exterior life, that the dogmas in which we believe should also be the dominant laws of our practical life, that our thinking and acting should always be in complete harmony. When we were ordained *acolytes* the Church once more reminded us of the duty of giving a good example, clothing her admonition in the beautiful picture of light that should illumine every one and everything about us.[3] And the higher we advanced in Holy Orders, the more earnest and impressive this exhortation became. God will remind us of this fact on Judgment Day: "I had it impressed on you early in life, at your very first entry into the sanctuary; like sevenfold thunder it sounded in your ears!"

[2] *"Quatenus cunctis, a quibus audimini et videmini, caelestis vitae formam praebeatis . . . Et agenda dicant et dicta opere compleant, ut in utroque sanctae ecclesiae exemplo sanctitatis suae consulant."* (*De Ordinat. Lector.*)

[3] *"Luceat lux vestra . . . Lucete sicut luminaria in mundo . . . Ut filii lucis ambulate . . . Ut et vos et alios et Dei ecclesiam illuminetis."* (*De Ordinat. Acolyth.*)

3. The Church knows that the cleric is "like a *mirror* to which all *others turn their eyes,*" as the Council of Trent says.[4] Every day, every hour, eyes are turned towards this mirror,—benevolent and malevolent eyes, naïve and spying eyes, clean and unclean eyes. Scripture says of the Saviour (Luke XIV, 1): *"Et ipsi observabant eum."* All watched Him: the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the learned and the ignorant, men and women, Jews and Gentiles, His Apostles and disciples, and also His Blessed Mother,—each from a different motive. Does this not also apply to the priest? Are not the eyes of all men upon him? How quickly does the child detect the priest when he walks along the street or enters the school! Young and old, men and women, good and bad, Freemasons and Socialists, fix their eyes upon him. Nobody is so closely watched as the priest. The clergy themselves observe one another closely,—is it not so? Then, there are many other, invisible eyes turned upon us,—those of the angels, of the Blessed, of our acquaintances, parents, parishioners who have passed into eternity. And lastly God Himself, who "is all eye," as St. Augustine says. Yes, even the demons keep their lynx-like eyes fixed upon our doings, very much concerned about the example we give, and with uncanny clairvoyance quickly see through our outward actions to the motives beneath. How many, therefore, are constantly watching us! All of them for one reason or another are interested in the priest, and to all we owe a good example.

[4] Sess. XXII, cap. 1, *de Reform.*

4. First of all to our holy *Church.* When she ordained us acolytes, she touchingly informed us that the Spouse of Christ wished to become luminous and radiant with the splendor of our virtues. We owe a good example to the Church of the *present.* The public opinion of a country regarding the Catholic clergy is made up of the sum-total of individual observations, and therefore each one of us in part holds in his hand the good or evil repute of the clergy as a whole. We know full well how the bad example of a single priest casts a cloud upon us all. We owe a good example also to the Church of the *future.* Some day, when the history of our time will be written, how the Church will suffer on account of the bad lives of clerics! How often, for instance, is she confronted to-day by her opponents with the bad example of the clergy of the Reformation era! What an advantage to her to be able to point to the example of good and holy priests! So let us by our good example enter our names upon the pages of church history, and make sure that the Church of the future need not be ashamed of us.

5. Above all we owe a good example to the *faithful* laity. *"Exemplum estote fidelium,"* this admonition of St. Paul to Timothy (IV, 12) applies to every priest. Every priest should practice the exemplary virtues enumerated by the Apostle. Our Catholic people desire that their priests should not be reproached deservedly, that no evil should be spoken of them with

reason. In the conflicts, temptations, and efforts attendant upon a virtuous life, souls wish to be lifted up by the example of the priest. In him they look for their ideal, and are painfully disappointed if they do not find the ideal of their faithful hearts in the presbytery. "He shall point out to his people the right way to live by the life he leads, and the flock that follows the voice and conduct of the shepherd makes better progress by example than if it were led merely by words," says St. Gregory the Great.[5]

We owe a good example in particular to the *children* of our parish. Children have the highest regard for the priestly office. They look upon the priest as a saint, and it is one of the most painful thoughts in connection with scandal given by a priest, that it enters like poison into the souls of the young, who are shocked beyond words when that incomprehensible thing,—the sin of a priest,—confronts them in all its hideous reality. How dreadful it must be to answer for such scandal before God!

The priest owes a good example also to the members of his *household*. At home, at close range, it is even harder to command respect and give a good example. We cannot imagine how much the spiritual life of those of our own household is furthered when they constantly see before them a real priest, a man of prayer, of order, of self-restraint, or how it is retarded by the example of one who gives way to his

[5] *"Vitae viam subditis vivendo denuntiet et grex, qui pastoris vocem moresque sequitur, per exempla melius quam per verba gradiatur."* (*Reg. Past.*, II, 3.)

passions, talks loosely, shows lukewarmness, does not even try to conceal his dissatisfaction with his sacerdotal vocation and its work, or sinks yet lower in the scale of failings and sins. Ah, why are the members of a priest's household ofttimes so deficient in piety and reverence? Why is the parsonage so rarely conducive to the sanctification of those who live in it? Does this state of affairs call for a *reformatio in membris* or not rather for a *reformatio in capite?* Even lesser faults and improprieties noticeable in the priest are apt to exert a bad influence on those who live under the same roof with him:—*e.g.,* irascibility, capriciousness, ill-temper, etc., not to speak of the *"domesticae dominatrices"* of whom we read in the decrees of certain councils, and who are the source of much dissatisfaction and disrespect, nay, grievous scandal.

Again, we owe a good example to the *sinners* and careless members of the congregation. We claim the right to judge in matters of morals, and rightly so; but how much contradiction and derision is provoked by a sinful, faulty censor? We chide the sinners and evildoers in our sermons and refute them with manifold arguments, but the best and most convincing refutation, after all, is a good example: *"Vita bona, bonus syllogismus."*

6. We further owe a good example to the enemies of the Church. Already the Apostles called attention to this duty (Coloss. IV, 5 etc.). It is true most of our enemies do not believe that we are virtuous; they do not want to believe it, but prefer to look upon us as

hypocrites. Yet we should do nothing that might give their accusation even the semblance of truth. *"In sapientia ambulate ad eos, qui foris sunt."* Not all the opponents of the Church are so blind and fanatical. Some are clear-headed and fair-minded enough to recognize the virtues of the clergy. Let us show to all who are of good will that the priesthood has worthy members, and that the Church of the twentieth century is still able to produce saints.

7. Finally, we owe a good example to our *fellow-priests.* What a powerful attraction there is in the good example of a priest! It has a peculiar force; it prods the lukewarm and indolent; it awakens a yearning to possess this same peace of soul, this same interior happiness, this same good conscience, this same mighty influence upon souls. The sight of virtue in a priest attracts other priests to the same heights which he has attained. An aged priest, long since dead, used to tell that he had not said his Breviary for years, but when young priests came to him and conscientiously confessed slight defects in reciting the Holy Office, he felt ashamed of himself and began saying his Office, and continued to do so with exemplary exactitude. I myself must admit that the sight of a young deacon completely absorbed in the recitation of his Office once made upon me an impression that lasted for years and still endures.

II. I have occupied considerable time in explaining the duty of giving a good example. Oh, that the

clergy would never forget this duty! But, alas, how much thoughtlessness do we not witness among them, how much indiscretion, what levity in language and conduct, in public places, when visiting, traveling, etc! How shall we fare when the Lord sits in judgment upon us! In order to put ourselves on our guard, let us recall once more the places and occasions that especially oblige us to give a good example.

1. First of all comes the *church*. Here we must keep in mind the rule: *"Nil nisi grave, moderatum ac religione plenum."* [6] This rule applies particularly to the Holy Mass. Men used to travel to Caesarea in Cappadocia to see and hear St. Basil say Mass. The piety shown by the priest at Holy Mass emits a secret power that affects the hearts of the faithful. His manner of celebrating Mass is a sermon for eyes and hearts, a sermon possessing its own convincing arguments, its powerful emotional language, its urgent application.

We should be seen at prayer in the house of God also at other times. It is advisable to make the thanksgiving after Mass in church, rather than in the sacristy, to say the Office in church occasionally, to make a public *visitatio Sanctissimi* now and then. It is strange to see parishioners paying frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament, whereas the pastor is never to be seen there. A layman once remarked to me that it did him good to see the pastor in church, even when duty did not com-

[6] *Conc. Trident.*, Sess. XXII, c. 1, *de Reform.*

pel him to be there. There are too many who look upon our calling as a trade.

The Rosary in the priest's hand is a source of edification. Pope Leo XIII exhorted the clergy to set a good example to their people in the recitation of the beads.

We should also give a good example by zealous *work*. The people should know that the pastor is not idle after 8 or 9 o'clock in the morning, but works and studies all day long. The parishioners, or at least a number of them, know the priest's daily order,—when he rises, when he eats, when he takes his walk, when he turns on the light at night, and when he turns it off. The people believe and take for granted that we priests occupy ourselves in studies of a spiritual nature. They have the correct idea when they fancy us sitting behind theological books. They cannot imagine us whiling away the time.

Let us give a good example also in promptly attending to matters of business. Procrastinating one's correspondence, allowing bills, etc., to pile up, is not only a mistake, but gives offense and discredits the clergy, especially in our day, when so much importance is attributed to efficiency, promptness, and despatch.

3. We should give a good example also by our *outward demeanor*. It is true that the world to-day overestimates external polish, which is often but a means of covering up inward decay. Still, the demand for good manners in a priest is just. Good manners are a part of the clerical virtue of modesty. How polite and

careful of propriety were most of the Saints! The founders of religious orders always stressed this virtue. To them a dignified bearing seemed but the outward manifestation of a well-disciplined character. Lack of culture is not synonymous with piety, and who does not know that the cause of religion is often injured by boorish priests? In dealing with ordinary folk in rural districts, the priest is apt to assume an air of familiarity and to cast off all restraint. But this is unwise. Even in the midst of uncultured peasants the priest ought always to observe that dignity and sobriety which distinguish the true gentleman. Genuine priestly decorum impresses friends and enemies alike and often is a key to the hearts of men. Neglectfulness in this regard sometimes does more harm than moral delinquency.

4. Kindness should mark our intercourse with our *fellow-priests.* If priests are not on good terms with one another, that is bad enough; but it is even worse if their conduct towards one another becomes a source of scandal to the people. "They preach charity," it will be said, "but do not practice it among themselves." It is strange to see two priests in a parish giving the *pax* to one another at the altar, whilst they notoriously live in discord. We are often accused of lack of brotherly love; let us try to silence this charge. In the Psalms there is a short but sweet song, in which brotherly love is likened to the fragrance of the ointment that runs from the head of Aaron over his priestly robes, and to the dew of Hermon descending from

Mount Zion.[7] Would that the sacred aroma of the love of Christ, our Head, would flow daily from the altar upon us and upon all who receive the same gifts as we, and work and fight for the same cause, so that we might be filled with brotherly love. "For there the Lord hath commanded blessing and life for evermore." [8] What a wealth of benediction does this spirit pour out upon the work of the individual and the united work of all! On the other hand, what a strong guarantee of heavenly blessing is lacking where brotherly love is absent or frequently violated! In cases of mutual difference seriously ask yourself before God: "Who is wrong? Am I to blame?" Do not trust your own judgment in such matters. But if you are sure you are right, bear the difference of opinion as a heavy cross, trust in God, and follow the advice of some confrère who is thoroughly imbued with the principles of Christian morality and priestly asceticism. If, on the other hand, *you* are to blame, then shirk neither difficulty nor sacrifice to put an end to the scandal.

5. Give a good example especially in dealing with *women*. The people closely watch the priest's behaviour towards women. Eyeing women seems now to be the custom everywhere. Let us show also in this regard that we are not of the world. How wise and

[7] *"Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum, habitare fratres in unum, sicut unguentum in capite, quod descendit in oram vestimenti Aaron, sicut ros Hermon, qui descendit in montem Sion."* (*Ps.* 132.)

[8] *Ibid.*

timely are the instructions given by St. Jerome to his well-beloved Nepotian.[9] He counsels him to avoid even the semblance of suspicion, lest people imagine evil, and warns him against too great self-reliance. "Do not rely on your past chastity," he says, "you cannot be holier than David, nor stronger than Samson, nor wiser than Solomon. Always remember that it was a woman who ejected the tenant of Paradise from his possessions."

6. Give a good example also in governing your *tongue*. Proper control of the tongue, as we all know, presupposes much virtue and self-control. *"Si quis in verbo non offendit, hic perfectus est vir"* (Jas. III, 2). Men are by nature inclined to indiscretion, to talkativeness, to gossip, etc., and the clergy do not always escape this weakness. *"Linguam non habeo caute custodiam"* [10] is one of the truest words we can address to God about ourselves. How many unpleasantnesses has a loose tongue brought upon us! A reticent old dean once told his young curate: "I have often regretted what I said, but I have never regretted what I left unsaid." *Probatum est.* True, sometimes silence is wrong; but we seldom err by curbing our tongue. The priest should weigh even his jests. Not that he should eschew innocent amusement and good cheer. Who is more entitled to be cheerful and happy than the good priest? The God whom we serve is the "God of all consolation" (2 Cor. I, 3). But the priest

[9] *Ep. 2, De Vita Clericor.*, n. 5, 6.
[10] *Oratio Pseudo-Ambrosii ante Missam.*

should not be a professional jester. He may provoke laughter, but nobody really respects a clerical clown. Besides, a priest's jokes are not always properly understood, especially by women and nuns.

Another reprehensible practice is excessive *scolding*. How saddening to brother priests and how offensive to the faithful if parishioners, trustees, co-workers, nay, the Ordinary himself, must feel the lash of a pastor's tongue. "Sitting thou didst speak against thy brother, and didst lay a scandal against thy mother's son" (Ps. XLIX, 20).[11] It certainly is not an enviable distinction to be known as the Thersites of a deanery or diocese. A sharp tongue is no recommendation before God or men, but robs a priest of God's grace and the confidence of men. "Hedge in thy ears with thorns, hear not a wicked tongue: and make doors and bars to thy mouth, and make a balance for thy words, and a just bridle for thy mouth" (Eccli. XXVIII, 28 f.)

7. The duty of giving a good example is particularly urgent and beset with special difficulties in the matter of *recreation*. Recreation is necessary to all men. Whilst religious are compelled by their rule to take suitable recreation, the secular priest, unfortunately, does not always do so. It would be a blessing to many a priest if, after or during his meals, the newspaper or book were taken from his hands, or the

[11] Cfr. St. Jerome, *Ep. ad Nepotian.*, 2, *De Vita Clericor.*, n. 17: *"Cura, ne aut linguam aut aures habeas prurientes. . . . Scito, quia per cuncta, quae de aliis loqueris, tua conscientia iudicaris et in his ipse deprehenderis, quae in aliis arguebas."*

light turned off early at night, or if he were ordered away from his desk for an hour or two every day and made to take a long walk. He would be less nervous, feel better, and accomplish more. A nervous priest is handicapped in meditating, in practicing patience, and in withstanding temptations.

But one may also err *per excessum* in this matter of recreation. A priest who idles away his time, who is frequently seen at the railroad station, on trains, automobiling, attending games, etc., does not give a good example to his poor, hardworking people, whether they be peasants or factory workers. The priest should avoid luxury and everything else that might even remotely justify the accusation, so commonly heard now-a-days, that the clergy talk beautifully of the next world and the life to come, but at the same time take good care to make their earthly life as pleasant as possible.

Let us conclude. Allow these urgent reasons for giving a good example to sink deeply into your soul. Give a good example always and everywhere,—in church, in school, in the parsonage, in public, during prayer, work and recreation. The priest should exhale the *odor vitae,* the breath of life, upon all that come near him. He should be an angel in the eyes of his people, a spectacle for friend and foe. With good example let us combine the word, and with the word, prayer, which must season and penetrate, support and maintain all our actions. *"Verbum, exemplum, oratio, tria haec; maior autem his oratio!"*

SECOND SERIES

FIRST MEDITATION

AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE PRIESTHOOD

God loves His priests and sends out many calls of grace to them from above. One of the mightiest of these calls is the summons to a retreat. Happy the priest who obeys this call willingly. Our Lord attaches extraordinary value to His doctrine. It is this holy, liberating doctrine, this blessed truth that came from Heaven, which we are assembled to hear once again, in order to apply it, not to others, but to ourselves. Experience teaches that the retreat is a time of special grace, a time when the Divine Spirit stirs men deeply. What a glorious thing it must be when the Holy Ghost stirs the heart of a priest! We have every reason to look forward with gratitude to the approaching *dies salutis* (2 Cor. VI, 2). Thousands must go without this grace. They have heard of the "Exercises," but know them only as some beautiful foreign country into which they may not venture. For us the gates stand wide open, inviting us to enter this sphere of truth and grace.

We certainly *need* grace. These spiritual exercises are almost a necessity for us. If religious, who live an austere life, need these exercises every year, as they

tell us they do, how much more do we need them,—we who all the year round are under no control but our own; we, about whom surge the voices of a fast-living age; who find it so hard to pray devoutly or to celebrate Mass with real interior recollection? Our souls have lost their brilliance and are covered with dust.[1] The better we know ourselves and the more strictly we judge our own conduct (1 Cor. XI, 31), the more urgently shall we feel the need of a retreat. It is necessary that he who preaches to others, year in and year out, should from time to time listen to another preaching to him.

Who of us doubts that the spiritual exercises are useful for priests? The isolation which is inseparable from the pastoral charge may easily affect one's interior life. There is danger of aridity. During the days of the retreat the *"fluenta Evangelii"* inundate the priest's soul, making it resemble a well-irrigated garden (*"hortus irriguus"*; Jer. XXXI, 12), which begins to flower and flourish once more. The consciousness of our solidarity is revived; we feel once again that we are members of one great army, the *"militia divina"* (Leo M.). This inspires courage and steels the heart.[2] These exercises will also produce a blessed external influence: our labors will gain in purity of in-

[1] Hicronymus, *"Animae, . . . quae candorem pristinae conversationis amiserat, ut excutiat pulverem cum apostolis, qui adhaesit pedibus eius."* (*In Ies.*, c. 52, v. 2.)

[2] *"Concordia fratrum, amor proximorum . . . bona haec sunt plane, iucunda et laudabilia in rebus humanis, sed in divinis rebus multo potentiora."* (St. Augustine, Sermo 359, *al. De Diversis*, 91, c. 1; Migne, 38, 1590.)

tention, and the *vita abscondita,* always the chief consideration, will be fostered with renewed zeal.

Accordingly it should be our endeavor to spend these days well. Let us be on our guard against that natural weakness which even the priesthood has not eradicated:—I mean the propensity to give free scope to our senses, particularly to the tongue. Let me remind you of the obligation of strict silence. It is a common experience that retreats at which silence is not observed fall short of their full effect. During these days God alone should occupy your souls. "God and I" should be your motto. It would be a pity if this work of God,[3] which He wishes to accomplish through the Holy Ghost, were impaired by lack of self-control. Let us also try hard to participate attentively in the meditations and to make a good confession. This, however, is not really the main purpose of the retreat; its main purpose is the reformation of our life, which will exert a beneficent influence upon the future, cause stagnant waters to flow, invigorate faint attempts, mature plans long since formed,—in a word, give a fresh impetus to our priestly life, whereby we shall be made happier and enabled to exert a greater influence upon souls and aid them more effectively on the way to salvation. This is a very great thing, which no human power, but only the *Creator Spiritus* can accomplish. "Let us return to ourselves," says St. Bernard, "and scrutinize our life; and in order that we may do this thoroughly, let us invoke the Spirit of truth, . . . because without Him we can do noth-

[3] Jer. XLVIII, 10.

ing."[4] During this retreat let us diligently practice the devotion to the Holy Ghost, that great special devotion of the priesthood, and often call upon the "Lord and Vivifier" for light and strength. Let us place ourselves under the special patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the "Queen of the Clergy," and commend ourselves to St. Ignatius, the great master and pathfinder on the difficult road of interior perfection.

With these few introductory remarks we will pass on to the subject-matter of our first meditation. What shall it be? It shall be a great idea,—the priestly life must be built on great ideas;—namely, the one which St. Ignatius places at the beginning of his Book of Exercises: *"De fine."* Let us contemplate, not only the *finis hominis,* but also the specific end and purpose of the priesthood. This is the great, the dominant idea of our life, hence let it also be the keynote of our retreat.

I. *The End of Man in General*

1. What is the end of man? That is the capital question of our existence. And yet, sad to say, whilst ancient wisdom vainly sought its solution, modern wisdom, satisfied with placing question-marks everywhere, has given it up, and countless persons no longer bother about it. Men have a clear idea about their immediate human ends and aims: they wish to gain position and wealth; but as to the supreme and ultimate aim of life, they live in frightful ignorance. Yet the answer

[4] *In Cantic.;* S. 17, 8.

to this question is all-important. St. Ignatius lays ex-extraordinary stress upon a thorough consideration of this subject, so that the right answer may sink deeply into our soul and become inseparable from our daily thoughts. Let us recall to mind this great, fundamental truth upon which everything depends, and which we cannot ponder too often.

2. *"Creatus est homo."* St. Ignatius starts out from the fact that *God has created us.* It is a great and potent truth. We are here; we have life, a weighty responsibility, a multitude of relations, and a future that is literally infinite. Yet we were not asked whether we were willing to enter this life. A sovereign power bestowed existence upon us and will keep us alive for ever. We are entirely dependent upon Him. Every breath, every drop of our blood, every thought of our mind is His gift.

This gives rise to the second question: *Why are we here?* What was God's purpose in giving us life? He could have no other object than Himself,—His glory, His honor, His service. Man is here to praise Him (*"ut Deum laudet"*), to glorify Him (*"ut eum revereatur"*), to serve Him (*"ut ei serviat"*), and thereby to be saved (*"eique serviens tandem salvus fiat"*). Behold, this is His eternal decree, *HIS* idea of man! Each word reveals the depths and heights of my being.

The mere fact that I am a creature suffices to justify these conclusions. I am a creature of God! Whoso-

ever lives according to this truth is a perfect man (cfr. Eccles. XII, 13).

3. The religious life is not based upon a confused mass of knowledge, but upon a few fundamental truths, which resemble the pillars that support a great temple. These truths are called by St. Ignatius *"fundamentum et principium,"* because they are (1) the necessary and the only enduring foundation upon which the spiritual life can be built, the only correct and tenable attitude of a Christian believer, and (2) they are first truths that are in themselves clear and evident; one need not even be a Catholic to accept them. They are the highest principles by which all things are decided; to live according to them is true wisdom.

Would that we shaped our lives according to these truths! We recognize them in theory, but in practice we are guilty of dangerous errors. Yet what *unity,* what marvelous simplicity, what magnificent coherence, what admirable consistency would the practical application of these principles give to our whole life! We wonder at the law of gravity which controls the material universe. The spiritual world, too, has its law of gravity. It is found in the voluntary, conscious tendency of intelligent creatures toward their centre, God. He, not our pitiful little I, is the centre of the universe. We are here for Him:—should not this thought hurl us out of the selfish movement around a false centre and throw us into the right sphere, so that we shall cleave to God alone?

"Adhaerere Deo bonum est" (Ps. LXXII, 28). How happy we should be if we adopted and practiced this maxim! Alas, by what means do poor mortals seek to make their fortunes? We ourselves, perhaps, have tried various means and failed. God in His mercy permitted our plans to miscarry. Nothing satisfied us: neither the gratification of the senses nor honors. How often have we not felt that nothing can satisfy us until we say: *"Ad Te, Domine, levavi animam meam"!* (Ps. XXIV, 1)

"Ad Te, Domine, levavi animam meam"! Thus it is written in the Introit of the first Sunday in Advent. *"Ad Te, Domine,"* is printed in large words at the beginning of the Canon, where we read every day: *"Te, igitur, clementissime Pater."* Thee, O God, and nothing else. Beyond all earthly things, beyond all narrow interests, I lift up my soul to Thee; for Thou art my last end. To serve Thee is my temporal, to possess Thee, my eternal and supernatural goal, toward which my life's bark steers from childhood to old age. In the thought of Thee my soul exults. "The world smiles upon us in many things that are beautiful and strong and varied: but He who made them is more beautiful, more powerful, and more illustrious than they, and far sweeter . . . I long for the Creator of all these, I hunger and thirst after Him." [5]

Absorb this great truth *de fine hominis,* and try to become enthusiastic over it. Be grateful to God for having given you such an exalted destiny. What a

[5] St. Augustine, Sermo 158, al. De Verbis Ap., 16, c. 7; Migne, 38, 866.

blessing that God has set up this sun on the horizon of your life!

II. *The End of the Priest in Particular*

We are not only men, we are also priests. The priesthood is a higher development of our destiny. Our end as men is based upon creation. Our end as priests is based upon a new, second, and even more mysterious creation,—the Sacrament of Holy Orders. *"Induat te Dominus novum hominem."* Our first origin is creation, our second, ordination. What special destination does this involve?

(a) By our ordination to the priesthood we have been dedicated to God in a far more exalted manner, with a still deeper obligation. The priest is preëminently a *"homo Dei,"* according to a significant and sublime expression of St. Paul in his first Epistle to Timothy.[6] He is a "man of God," wholly encompassed by and incorporated with the Divinity. He is the administrator of the *cultus divinus* among men, as St. Thomas says,[7] and performs his task by means of sacrifice and Sacrament. If man is on earth *"ut laudet Deum,"* then the priest is destined to praise Him by the highest kind of adoration, the holy Mass and the Breviary, as a *sacrificium laudis.* If it is man's chief duty *"ut Deum revereatur,"* the priest discharges this obligation in the broadest sense as the conductor of divine worship, *"ut*

[6] 1 Tim. VI, 11.
[7] *Summa Theol.,* IIIa, qu. 63, a. 6.

ei serviat." He must serve God by every kind of virtue, by a life which bears the stamp of special consecration, and be completely wrapped up in Him. *"Salvus fiat,"* for doing this a distinctive happiness and reward await him. If the end of man, as man, is his assumption into an ocean of bliss, how much more so the end of the priest. Who can describe the sacred mystery of the *"tandem salvus fiat"* of the priest, the blessedness and joy of his eternal reward? St. Ephrem concludes his splendid sermon on the priesthood as follows: "Ah, what must it be like when Christ Himself, in the presence of the Angels, places the diadem of immortality [upon the priest], and he, with the heavenly choirs sings to the Most Holy Trinity a hymn of victory for evermore!" It is something unutterable: *"oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis intravit"* (1 Cor. II, 9). His path is like that shining light that increaseth, even to perfect day.[8] The priest's destiny is to be absorbed by an unending light, by a resplendent ocean of glory.

(b) We should love to recall the day when this lofty destiny was imprinted with the *character indelebilis* upon our soul,—the day of our ordination. When we read that profound chapter of Genesis which tells of the creation of man, let us not forget that for us there was a second, solemn creation, the day when we received the sacred priesthood. Perhaps that day still lies in the immediate past, perhaps it is already

[8] Prov. IV, 18: *"Lux splendens procedit et crescit usque ad perfectam diem."*

far behind us;—but whether we are old or young, the sacred character is the same, the obligation is the same, the destiny is the same,—all are as fresh and new in the soul as they were on that first day. In later years we are often thrilled and refreshed when we recall the early days of our priesthood, with their earnestness and zeal. Through that wonderful Sacrament of Holy Orders, by which the priest arose within us, we received the destiny which we still carry and shall carry till our last day, and for which we must thank God on our knees. For, it is something extraordinary, something grand and wonderful to have been the object of God's thought from all eternity, to live in the Divine Mind as a priest, to be a priest here on earth, and to remain a priest forever.

If at the end of our first point we felt constrained to thank God, let us thank Him even more ardently now for the glorious destiny he has deigned to prepare for us as priests.

2. So far we have considered the end of the priest in a general way. Now let each one of us ask himself: What is my personal destiny as a priest?

(a) God is the absolute, infinite, sovereign Lord of all creation. *"Tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus."* Therefore every creature must serve Him. *"Nonne Deo subiecta erit anima mea?"* (Ps. LXI, 2.) This service must be such as the Lord has appointed. Now God has a fixed purpose for every man. Each man is a person, that is, has something which distinguishes him

and belongs to him alone. Among the billions of men that have lived and are now living, there has not been one exactly like me, and among those still to be created there will be none like me. No two human beings are identical or even exactly alike. It is this singularity that decides our place and our task in creation (Faber). Every man has his own peculiar destiny and purpose, his own peculiar calling, his special way of glorifying God. God had the concept of each and every one of us from all eternity; time, country, place of birth, gifts, graces, glory,—all were planned in advance. If a person conforms to this idea of himself in the mind of God, his destiny is fulfilled; God obtains through him that particular honor which He wanted, and bestows upon him a glory all his own, different from that of any other creature. But if a man does not conform to the divine plan, God is thereby deprived of an honor which no one else can supply.

(b) Let us apply this truth to ourselves. Let us say to ourselves: From all eternity I have lived in the mind of God as a priest,—as the priest that I am,—as a priest of this country, this century,—as a priest with this particular mission, with these special endowments, with this individual soul,—as a priest subject to these particular afflictions, this disease, this manner of death; destined to live so or so many years,—all ordered in number, measure, and weight (Wisd. XI, 21). I have to fulfill a distinct task, peculiar to me, namely, to glorify God and promote His honor in a particular way, and thereby to attain to a glory that will forever

have a color all its own. There is something marvelously beautiful in this idea of singularity, which God in His omnipotence, wisdom, and love has evolved concerning each and every one of us; it ought to rouse us to the most ardent gratitude, nay, exultation. How magnificent is this design of my priestly life, planned by an infinite Wisdom that cannot deceive, by an infinite Love that seeks only what is best for me! The older we grow, the more this divine plan reveals itself, though we shall probably never comprehend it fully here below. But what rapture in eternity, when the tortuous ways of life will be unveiled and a single, wondrously wise plan will become manifest to us.

(c) What follows from this? It follows that I must by all means conform to this divine idea, that my life must correspond with the plan which God would realize through me, that I must live according to my particular destiny, that I must realize the thoughts, the hopes, the plans of God, and consequently employ all my faculties in His service, lead the souls intrusted to me to Him, carry the cross that is laid upon me and so forth. How beautiful if God obtains through me that special glory which He can obtain in no other way! But how sad if I misuse the power I have over myself, if I do not fulfill my predestined mission, if, like Saul in the Old Testament, God should reject me in the end as a failure, a disappointment, a broken vessel that has become useless! It is terrifying to contemplate what God expects of us and to realize what an ocean of grace surrounds us for this purpose.

How fortunate shall I be if I fill the particular position that has been assigned to me among the billions of God's creatures, so as to promote His honor and glory! How disastrous if I do not conform with my appointed destiny! In the vast garden of the Church, now nineteen hundred years old, I am to bloom as a flower of a peculiar color, with a fragrance all its own; an object of admiration to the countless inhabitants of Heaven for all eternity. As *"stella a stella differt in claritate"* (1 Cor. XV, 41), so also do the elect differ in individual glory. What an incentive to devote ourselves to this particular destiny, to be content with our talents and the position we are commanded to fill; to fill it as well as we can, and thus grow to eternal glory!

This, however, does not mean that we should serve God in our own fashion. No, we must serve Him according to *His will.* But that will is full of wisdom. It points out to us a definite way, a way that admirably suits all our talents. Hence we must diligently inquire what is the will of God concerning us, whether our vocation, our mission is in harmony with it, not abandon ourselves to ambitions which restlessly and willfully force us beyond the limitations assigned by God, seeking our own glorification. This line of conduct, of course, requires self-denial. Right here at the entrance of the Exercises stands a signpost with the inscription: "Self-denial, Sacrifice, Submission." *"Vince teipsum"* is the motto which St. Ignatius always places to the fore, and indeed it is one of the fundamental axioms of the spiritual life. If we live according to this axiom, we shall surely be saved.

The meditation *de fine* lifts us up and shows us the loftiness of our destiny. I know why I am here and what I must do:—it is my mission to serve God as a man and a priest, eternally, according to the order of Melchisedech (Hebr. V, 10); to serve Him in the manner He wishes, with that distinctive destiny in view that He has fixed for me. Whatsoever I build on this foundation stands firmly, will last for time and eternity; everything else is built on sand. Who would not rather build his house on a rock than on sand? Let these truths sink deeply into our souls and let us answer the question: *"Ad quid venisti?"*—in a manner worthy of a thinking man, of a Christian, and of a priest.

SECOND MEDITATION

THE DIGNITY AND CORRESPONDING SANCTITY OF THE PRIEST

1. *The Dignity of the Priest*

THE people in addressing a priest call him "Reverend Father,"—an expression which denotes the greatness of his dignity. We often hear ourselves addressed thus, we read the phrase almost carelessly in letters that reach us. Why are we "Reverend,"—to be revered? Because of our priesthood; because of the *indelible character* the Sacrament of Holy Orders has impressed upon us.

1. Theologians differ in defining this "character;" but they all agree that it is something superlatively grand and mysterious. St. Thomas thinks it consists in a certain likeness to Christ.[1] Christ is the great High Priest, and every priest is in a way another Christ. *Our priesthood* is not something distinct in itself; *it is the priesthood of Christ.*[2]

Consider the *sublimity* of Christ's priesthood and its *origin.* It is founded upon an eternal oath of God [3] and

[1] *Summa Th.*, 3a, qu. 63.
[2] *Ibid.*, a. 6; qu. 22, a. 5. 6.
[3] *"Iuravit Dominus";* Hebr. VII, 21.

began with the ineffable anointment of the humanity of Christ with His Divinity in the Hypostatic Union of the two natures. Next consider the *majesty* of Christ. *"Sedet a dextris Dei,"* the Evangelist says of Him (Mark XVI, 19). Dominion is upon His shoulders. The priest is a reflection of Christ. Upon his shoulders also rests dominion. In his hands he holds a most marvelous power that extends beyond all earthly things and penetrates without hindrance the very Heaven of heavens,[4]—*i. e.,* the power of consecrating, of absolving from sin, of teaching, of blessing. Each of these faculties constitutes a realm of its own. Therein lies the glory of the priesthood. Owing to the "character" conferred at ordination the priesthood endures for ever (*in aeternum*). The sacerdotal "character" is *indelebilis, i.e.,* nothing can destroy it. Our hair may turn white, our hands tremble, but this character remains as fresh as on the day when it was imprinted upon the soul. The wondrous day of our ordination may lie far off in the past, the years may have blanched our hair, but the character of the priesthood is ever resplendent and glorious. In Heaven it will shine with a wondrous light, in hell it will stand out like a stigma. No sin, no heresy, neither suspension nor excommunication can take the priestly character away from us. Truly the priest is a *reverendus,* a mysterious personage.

2. Now we can appreciate the exuberant terms in which the *Fathers* extol the priesthood. One cannot

[4] St. Ephrem, *De Sacerd.,* c. 1.

read these expressions without feeling a holy thrill. "Great, surpassingly great, yea infinitely sublime" is the priesthood, says St. Ephrem Syrus.[5] It "exceeds everything else in greatness and dignity," St. Gregory of Nanzianzus assures us.[6] "The priesthood is divine, the noblest among existing things," writes St. Isidore of Pelusium.[7] These utterances date from an early age which was remarkable for its strong faith. But the Saints of later centuries speak the same language, and so does the Church. If we quietly ponder the words which the Church pronounced over us at ordination, we shall marvel at her exalted opinion of the priesthood. It is an overwhelming thought that we know not the mysteries of which we are the bearers. "If the priest knew what he is, he would die," says St. John Baptist Vianney, the recently canonized Curé of Ars.

3. What follows from this? It follows:

(a) That we should entertain a *lofty idea of the sacerdotal dignity.* Would that the *character indelebilis* were not so often effaced from our consciousness! *"Magnificat anima mea,"* should be our daily cry of exultation; *"magna fecit, qui potens est"* (Luke I, 46, 49). O Priest of God, if you always remembered what you are, would not many a defect and weakness disappear? Frequent reflection upon what we are through

[5] *De Sacerd.*, c. 6.
[6] *De Fuga Sua*, c. 4.
[7] *Epist.*, II, 52.

and before God and His heavenly court, would give us a better appreciation of our holy calling and support us in temptations. In the Old Testament it is said of the sons of Heli, that they were "children of Belial, not knowing the Lord, nor the office of the priests" (1 Kings II, 12 ff.). Their wickedness is attributed to their not understanding their holy office. Does not the same truth apply to us? *"Nescientes officium sacerdotum,"*—what injury arises to the priesthood from the fact that so many of its members forget their "Reverence," give no thought to the holy, indelible character of the priesthood, feel *"tanquam unus ex plebe."* This attitude is entirely unbecoming in view of the fact that God Himself has lifted the priest *"de stercore, ut collocet eum cum principibus"* (Ps. CXII, 7). "The priestly dignity lays claim to unusual weight; but how can he be revered by the people who withholds nothing from them, who is in no wise different from the multitude?" [8]

(b) This priestly elation, however, must be attended by profound *humility.* Behold the Saviour washing the feet of His Apostles! He humiliates Himself, but it is in connection with this act of humiliation that the Evangelist says: *"Sciens Iesus, quia omnia dedit ei Pater in manus"* (John XIII, 3). What an example for us! We, too, should place side by side with this priestly "character" our personal unworthiness, our sins, the sad history of our soul, its open wounds, our past and present. If we do so, we cannot help being amazed that our Divine Lord tolerates us. *"Intelli-*

[8] St. Ambrose, *Ep.*, 28, 2; Migne, 16, 1096.

gant," cries St. Lawrence Justiniani, *"intelligant, quid ex gratia quidve habeant a natura, et quid sint per culpam."* [9] Wherever the priestly dignity is not accompanied by humility, the priesthood becomes a source of danger. Lucifer, who admired himself in the splendor of his beauty, was "brought down to hell" (Is. XIV, 13 ff.). Are not he and the Pharisees who strut before us in the Gospel a warning to the priests of the New Testament? "The foundation of humility should be solid, undefiled, most pleasing to God; and if this virtue is lacking in those who direct others, then the greater and sublimer the office which they discharge before men, the more contemptible they are," again says St. Lawrence Justiniani.

(c) Finally, we must conduct ourselves in a manner *corresponding to the priestly character.* Consistency is a rare jewel. St. Hilary, when asked what he was, answered: *"Episcopus sum."* Our reply should be: "I am a priest, and, thank God, nothing else!" This thought must be the mainspring of our conduct: I am a Catholic priest, not a man of the world, not a money-maker, or a politician, but a priest in the full sense of the word, inwardly and outwardly, in dress and deportment, without worldliness, a whole man *sui generis.* I am a Catholic priest: that is sufficient for me; it is my pride, my good fortune, my honor, "the beginning of my joy" (Ps. CXXXVI, 6). What respect does not the true priest compel on all sides!

[9] *De Institut. et Reg. Praelat.*, c. 21.

II. *The Sanctity of the Priest*

1. To the dignity of the priesthood corresponds holiness of life. The priest should be a holy man. We do not, of course, insist upon that heroic sanctity which the Apostles and canonized Saints attained, however desirable it would be. What we demand for every priest is that ordinary sanctity which is within the reach of every Christian, the perfection of life corresponding to the sacerdotal state.

(a) The priest is an *alter Christus,* hence his sanctity must be a *reflex of the sanctity of Christ,* of whom it was said: *"Sacerdos in aeternum,"* and: *"Sanctus, impollutus, segregatus a peccatoribus, excelsior caelis factus"* (Hebr. VII, 26). *"Sanctus"* means clothed in the holiness of Christ, says St. Lawrence Justiniani. *"Impollutus,"* unsullied like his priestly alb; so should his soul be,—pure, like a manifestation from the world of heavenly spirits. *"Segregatus a peccatoribus"* means: not one of the throng of sinners, not one who runs with the crowd, but one who is set apart from the rest. *"Excelsior caelis,"* poised aloft, far above the earth and its ordinary concerns, like one "who has the body of a man and the mind of an angel, who lives on earth, but enjoys citizenship in Heaven," as St. Chrysostom says.[10]

(b) An unholy Christ would be a contradiction in itself; an unholy priest is a monster, because sanc-

[10] *Hom. 4 in illud: Vidi Dominum,* n. 5; Migne, 56, 126.

tity belongs to the very *nature of the sacerdotal office.*

Think only of the *power of consecration!* We and the people have the profound conviction that this power demands sanctity. Even the sinful priest cannot throw off this conviction. The demand for holiness vibrates throughout his sinful career. Every step at the altar speaks of sanctity. Ascending the altar we say: *"ut sancta sanctorum puris mereamur mentibus introire."* How sublime is the Preface, when we take our place among the *"Angeli atque Archangeli, Cherubim quoque ac Seraphim,"* and join in the thrice holy: *"Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus!* Every ear that has not grown deaf understands this language.

In a similar way the *Sacrament of Penance* requires sanctity. In the confessional we exercise an authority and a power that really belongs to God; *"ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis." "Quis potest dimittere peccata nisi solus Deus?"* (Mark II, 7). We hurl anathemas at Satan and sin. What an anomaly if we ourselves are bound by the fetters which we break for others! How ashamed we feel when an innocent, truly pious penitent kneels before us, and we know ourselves to be unholy! This shame is the psychological reflex of our conviction that we ought to be much holier than we are when we sit in judgment in the highest tribunal on earth, "exalted in self-denial and virtue," as St. Ambrose says of the priest.[11]

(c) We owe it also to our *people* that we lead a holy life. St. Ambrose calls the priest *"dux sanc-*

[11] *Enarr. in Ps.,* XXXVI, n. 28; Migne, 14, 1028.

titatis." Only a saintly priest can lead his people to virtue. *"Qualis sacerdos, talis populus."* Sanctity is productive. What is the real reason of the unproductiveness of our pastoral activity? There is no lack of talent or vim; you labor hard at the altar, in the pulpit, in the confessional, in school; but you lack holiness. Whence the magnetic influence that draws souls to this or that priest? It is his sanctity that mysteriously attracts all hearts to him.

(d) How necessary is a holy priesthood particularly in the age in which we live! Görres says that the Pope might well pronounce an exorcism upon the world every day from St. Peter's; Leo XIII spoke of the "spirits who go about the world for the destruction of souls." What spirits are these? They are the evil spirits from hell, who seek to propagate their rebellion among men; "unclean spirits" (*"spiritus fornicationis"*) that stalk about as perhaps never before, and threaten to murder the nations. No hamlet is now so remote that the venom of modernism does not penetrate into its dwellings. When we see our congregation in church on Sunday morning we are consoled; but where are these people in the afternoon and evening, where do they spend the night? If we could hear and see what is going on all around us, if we could look into the hearts of men, what scenes of horror (*"abominationes magnae"*; Ezech. VIII, 6) would meet our eyes, even in the smallest village! And as for the towns, especially the big cities! "I know where thou dwellest, where the seat of Satan is" (Apoc. II,

13). These words addressed to the Angel of Pergamus apply to many a priest. In this sad decline of the human race, in the midst of so many enemies, what can we accomplish if we are not ourselves holy? When Christ, our Lord and exemplar, stood in the midst of His enemies—heathen, unbelievers, sceptics,—and they asked Him: "What is truth?" (John XVIII, 38), how did He answer them? He asked: "Which of you shall convince Me of sin?" (John VIII, 46). Is not the Catholic priest to-day surrounded by a similar horde of unbelievers, doubters, sceptics, Epicureans? What can he oppose to them? His dignity and doctrine, but above all the example of a holy life! That many priests are deficient in this quality, that they are victims of lukewarmness, worldliness, and sin, should not discourage us, but, on the contrary, make our hearts re-echo with the thunderous admonition: *"Sancti estote!"* (Levit. XI, 14); *"Ipsi in omni conversatione sancti sitis!"* (1 Pet. 1, 15).

(e) Our priestly calling places us squarely before the alternative: *"aut sanctus aut reprobus."* There can be no neutrality in this respect. Every human being, and especially the priest, must decide to walk either in the way of holiness or the way of reprobation. He will go either to Heaven or to hell; and he will not go alone, but take other souls with him. The gifts and graces which we possess can be made either a blessing or a curse: there is no middle way.

Thus everything reminds us of the necessity of leading a holy life: our likeness to Christ as priests, our

sacred powers, especially at the altar and in the confessional, the people to whom we should be *duces sanctitatis,* the needs of our times, the number of sinful priests. Even our opponents, our bitterest enemies, teach us the necessity of sanctity. The sensation created by the downfall of a priest is a splendid testimonial to the fact that friend and foe expect a priest to be holy, that sanctity is an essential mark of his office, and that it is true what St. Augustine writes: *"Sacerdotes non nomine, sed sanctitate pensandi sunt."* [12]

2. As the fruit of this meditation let us realize the necessity of striving after holiness. Let us put an end to that lassitude entailed by human weakness and renew the resolution to achieve sanctity at whatever cost! "It is a holy disposition that makes men holy," says St. Bernard,[13] "compounded of fear of the Lord and holy love." *"Timor Domini sanctus."* The fear of offending God by a deliberate sin results in a determined fight against all, even venial sins, and withdraws the heart from attachment to earthly things. *"Sanctus amor"* is that whole-hearted, loving devotion to God by which a man desires to serve and please Him in all things, and is not satisfied with its endeavors to make progress or attain perfection, or, as the same Saint says elsewhere,[14] never declares it is enough, but always hungers and thirsts after justice, so that, if

[12] *De Civitate Dei,* XX, 21, 3.
[13] *De Considerat.,* V, 14.
[14] *Ep., 254, 2, ad Abb. Guarin.*

he should live for ever, he would for ever strive to be more righteous; for, so we are assured by the Doctor Mellifluus,[15] he is no longer good who has not the wish to be better; *"ubi incipis nolle fieri melior, ibi etiam desinis esse bonus . . . Solus Deus melior seipso esse idcirco non vult, quia non valet."*

3. Shall we be able to attain that degree of sanctity to which our vocation obliges us? Not by ourselves strength, for by nature we possess naught but the sorry inheritance of sin, imperfection, and weakness. But we take courage when we contemplate two inspiring scenes,—two ordinations to the priesthood. The one took place at the Last Supper in the Cenacle at Jerusalem. The Saviour Himself ordains His Apostles, lays the *onus sacerdotii* upon their shoulders, and, in conclusion, raises His eyes up to heaven and prays. He recites that high-priestly prayer, every word of which should be engraved upon our hearts. He prays to the Father for Himself and for His Apostles. *"Sanctifica eos in veritate"* (John XVII, 17), He says. What an inspiring moment! Around Our Divine Saviour stand His Apostles, deeply moved, and before Him His entire priesthood to the end of time. He gazes upon all and for all entreats the Father: "Sanctify them in truth." Oh, in that hour His eye rested upon you, too, my friend; for you, too, did the Holiest of the holy beseech God: "Father, sanctify them in truth." And this prayer for the princes and priests of His kingdom was surely heard by the Father: *"ego sciebam, quia*

[15] *Ep. ad Abbates*, 91, 2, 3.

semper me audis" (John XI, 42). It was offered up, also for us, and hence we may confidently rely on Christ's powerful intercession.

Now contemplate another ordination,—your own. It took place a few years or perhaps decades ago, in the glorious, happy time of youth. You knelt before the bishop with a heart full of enthusiasm and beautiful ideals, looking joyfully at the present and confidently into the future. The bishop solemnly made the Sign of the Cross over you, while you lay prostrate before him, and holding the crosier in his hand, he besought the Lord in Heaven for you: *"ut hos electos benedicere, sanctificare et consecrare digneris."* Repeatedly in many prayers (Preface, etc.) the Church cries to Heaven for us. When we reread these prayers, are we not moved by the thought: Thus they prayed for me; with the same insistency, the same importunity, the same well nigh temptestuous knocking at the door of God's heart, the Church pleaded and pleads for me? Must not this thought inspire us with confidence? Can the Spouse of Christ plead in vain? We have received the sacramental grace, the *character indelebilis,* sanctifying grace, and the grace peculiar to our office. These prayers should guide us like stars through the twilight of life, and the sacramental grace of the priesthood, the second and highest of all the Sacraments of the New Testament, should impel us upon the way to holiness.

THIRD MEDITATION

SIN IN THE LIFE OF THE PRIEST

We have meditated on the glorious destiny of the priest, his dignity and sanctity. That was a luminous, sunlit region. Now comes its counterpart, the nocturnal region of the priestly life with its deep, dismal shadows cast by sin.

In the history of Divine Revelation we meet with a few mighty paradigms by which God shows us the frightfulness of sin. They are, as it were, comprehensive, terrible portrayals, which are placed before our eyes in order that we may study sin. From out of the great sins committed by creatures St. Ignatius of Loyola, in his Book of Exercises, has selected two terrifying examples. The one happened in that mysterious prehistoric time before man was created, the other at the beginning of the history of our race. The first was the sin of the angels, the second, that of our first parents. These are great catastrophes in the history of the world, more momentous than any that have happened since. They are objects of contemplation suited especially to priests! For the sin of a priest and these sins have many features in common.

I. *The Sin of the Fallen Angels*

When we compare the sin of the fallen angels with that of the priest, we do not, of course, deal with a perfect analogy; but there are resemblances enough to strike us with terror.

1. The first point of resemblance is the high station of both. A priest is an angel: even the Old Testament, which represents only the *"egena elementa"* (Gal. IV, 9), so styles him (Malach. II, 7). How much more the priest of the New Testament! *"Ex homine totus in angelum substitutus,"* says St. Peter Chrysologus.[1] He is placed above the angels, not in dignity, but in authority.[2] *"Praetulit vos Angelis, praetulit Dominationibus,"* exclaims St. Bernard of Siena. The greater the glory of the fallen angels was, the greater, by contrast, is their present disgrace. So also with the priest. *"Quomodo cecidisti de caelo, Lucifer?"* (Is. XIV, 12) one may say to him. *"Quomodo,"* how is it possible? *"De caelo,"* he falls from on high. *"Cecidisti,"* that is indeed a terrible fall, says St. Alphonsus de' Liguori. "The higher a man has risen, the deeper he falls. What is higher than heaven? He who sins falls from the heights of heaven," says St. Peter Chrysologus.[3] It is a *lucifer,* a morning star, which thus falls down from heaven; an apparition of light over which Death has drawn his

[1] Sermo 26; Migne, 52, 273.
[2] St. Chrysostom, *De Sacerdot.,* III, 5; Montfauc., p. 468.
[3] *Op. cit.,* p. 272.

shadows, and this phenomenon is something so uncanny that it makes one shudder. The sinful priest is a fallen angel, an extinct star. How high those angels stood! They were marvelous creatures both in the order of nature and of grace. And the priest? Elevated high above the multitude, the daily companion of Jesus Christ at the Eucharistic table, completely enveloped in the splendor of the Holy Eucharist, he is a special object of divine benevolence. Like the sin of the angels, the sin of the priest involves a veritable abyss of ingratitude, and ingratitude is unutterably despicable in the eyes of God. "Thou wast the seal of resemblance, every precious stone was thy covering, and—thou hast sinned!" (Ezech. XXVIII, 12, 13).

2. The dreadful resemblance between the fallen angels and the sinful priest goes even farther. The angels had a keen intellect; they knew exactly what they were doing (*"plenus sapientia peccasti"*; Ezech. XXVIII, 12). The priest, too, knows what he is doing when he sins. He has studied moral theology. In his desk there are dozens of sermons and instructions in which he described to the faithful in lurid colors the enormity of sin and its dreadful consequences. He has perhaps more than once preached a thunderous sermon on the very sin which he now commits, or has argued against it in the confessional with all the force at his command. Oh, how eloquently he can talk of the amiability of God as the supreme Good, of the Fountain of living waters as compared with the miserable cisterns of sin (Jerem. II, 13), of the precious

treasure of sanctifying grace, and so forth. Whilst saying his Breviary he was suffused with a light from Heaven, and now behold, he consciously steps out of this radiant sphere into the dark night of sin! In the Little Hours he prayed: *"In aeternum non obliviscar iustificationes tuas,"* and, as though those words had been spoken in a spirit of mockery, he goes and aligns himself with the devil. At the conclusion of the Office he recited the *"Salve Regina,"* and now he consciously addresses his *"Salve"* to some wretched creature. During Holy Mass he was in close proximity to "the blessed and immortal nature" [4] of the Son of God, and now he dives into the cesspool of vice. And thus it may happen that the sin of the priest takes on the character of inexplicable malice.

3. Then, too, the *consequences* of mortal sin when committed by a priest, the condition which it induces in his soul, give to that sin a demoniacal physiognomy by making him obdurate. St. Chrysostom and several other Church Fathers describe this phenomenon as the severest punishment that can come upon a sinful soul. The wretched victim obfuscates his own conscience and bewilders the conscience of others by false arguments and insincere attempts at palliating his conduct. He tries to silence the cries of his poor victim's conscience. He harbors no thought of amendment. A person accustomed to the roar of battle does not quail at the mouth of the belching cannon; so also the priest who has become a prey to insensibility does not flinch

[4] St. Chrysostom, *De Sacerdot.*, III, 5.

when he hears of divine justice or reads in his Breviary of the judgments of the Lord, but callously lets the thunder roll by. The most sacred functions of his office are to him a spiritless, mechanical business. He is capable, when burying the dead, of describing the thrilling earnestness of the hour of death, of painting mighty pictures of Heaven, eternity, and hell, in a perfectly cold and impersonal way. The agony of the dying, the open grave, so often yawning before him, do not move his heart. The adorable Sacrament of the Altar, that burning hearth of love, is unable to melt his frozen heart.

All this is not yet demoniacal obduracy, absolute impenitence, but it is closely akin to it. The Saints tell us that the nearness of the devil gives rise to a feeling that is unspeakably uncanny; is it not also an uncanny feeling to be near an obdurate priest, a fallen angel? In one respect the state of the priest differs from that of the demons. Theirs was but a single sin, his sins are countless. There is a frightful fertility in the sin of a priest: it is a veritable *mysterium iniquitatis.*

II. *The Sin of Adam*

1. The sin of Adam was the primeval fault which poisoned all humanity. It was committed in Paradise and led to the loss of sanctifying grace. How it hurts to read of this deed of darkness! But is not the sin of the priest, in a sense, still darker, even more incomprehensible! It is a sin committed in the midst of the paradise of the priesthood,—a garden planted by the

Saviour Himself and watered with a stream of grace. In it He planted the tree of life, the Holy Eucharist, and in this garden of pleasure placed the priest. In the golden years of adolescence the loving hand of God gently led him into this land of light, love, grace, and happiness, made him a spectacle for angels and men, a favorite of Heaven; and now: *"Incrassatus est dilectus et recalcitravit"* (Deut. XXXII, 15). Oh, his is not an ordinary, his is a deep, a terrible fall! The priest who leads a sinful life turns his back upon Paradise and reverts to the thorns and thistles of the earth. And often enough, as in the case of Adam, the serpent employs a woman as its tool. *"Dixit serpens ad mulierem"* (Gen. III, 1),—that is how it starts. The serpent whispers to the woman, the woman hands the fruit of death to the priest; *"mulier dedit mihi et comedi"* (Gen. III, 12).

2. The priest's sin resembles that of Adam especially in this, that he drags others with him into perdition. The fall of Adam involved the whole human race; the priest's fall, too, has the direst consequences for *others*. It is not possible to show by statistics how far the published sins of a priest draw their awful circles; God alone knows it. By sins of the flesh a priest robs his guilty accomplice of respect for the priesthood, nay, perhaps kills her faith. And as for his congregation—does not a veritable stench of putrefaction rise from the priest's sin? How firmly does it impress itself on the minds of the young! What a toothsome morsel it is for the delectation of the enemies of the

Church! To what terrible temptations against the faith does it not give rise! "You have been a snare to them whom you should have watched over, and a net spread upon Thabor" (Osee V, 1). What harm does it not do to brother priests! They have to go about with the crushing consciousness that they are looked upon as criminals And the Church herself! Whenever an oak is felled, the whole forest reverberates with the crash. The same phenomenon is caused morally throughout a diocese and even beyond its limits by the fall of a priest. It is a recognized fact that laymen justify their wicked lives by pointing to the bad example of priests, and that often a veritable deluge of sins among the laity follows in the wake of a scandal in the priesthood.[5] How much does not the Church suffer in consequence! *"Odor vitae vestrae delectamentum Ecclesiae Dei,"* [6] was her petition and her hope at ordination. How the Church is cheated of her fondest hope in the case of a priest who goes astray! The effects of his sin are like those of an avalanche. Whoever is drawn into its vortex must suffer. "No one does more harm in the Church than he who has the name and order of sanctity, yet acts perversely." [7]

[5] "Not so easily does cloth take the color into which it is steeped; not so easily is the agreeable or disagreeable odor of a thing communicated to objects brought near it; not so easily do a poisonous breath and the germs of disease spread in the air and thus reach living beings, thereby causing what is called pestilence, as does the vice of a superior infect inferiors; much more slowly does virtue communicate itself." (St. Greg. Naz., *De Fuga Sua*, c. 11.)

[6] *Pontif., De Ord. Presb.*

[7] St. Gregory the Great, *Reg. Past.*, I, 2.

How terrible to answer before God for the injury done to a single soul! But what if a priest, who ought to be the father, guide, and guardian of his flock, ravages their souls by giving scandal and thus becomes their murderer!

III. *Our Sins in the Priesthood*

Our conscience may not reproach us with such flagrant and scandalous crimes. And yet, alas, we have made our contribution to the sins of the priesthood, nay, we continue to make them day by day. Let us cast a backward glance upon our sacerdotal life. We have forgotten much, but have we not retained a sort of gloomy feeling that not everything is in order with reference to what we have been in the sight of the all-holy God? When we face the Majesty of the Lord of hosts, do we not find all the pages of our past life sullied with sin and guilt? "Can man be justified compared with God? Behold, even the moon doth not shine and the stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man that is rottenness, and the son of man who is a worm?" (Job XXV, 4 ff.) If the Church commands the saintliest priest to confess his sins aloud every day and to bow deeply before Heaven and earth, must we not stand humbly before the altar and say: *"Confiteor Deo omnipotenti"?* What are we before God? What are we poor, trembling creatures in the hands of Omnipotence? What are we before the spotless Holiness of Christ? What are we before His omniscience? He knows exactly what we are. And

what kind of picture is it that we present? How naked and transparent we stand in the light of His knowledge! *"Confiteor Deo,"* that is a crushing utterance. And then: *"Beatae Mariae semper Virgini";*—every morning we stand deeply bowed before the most pure Virgin, this bright mirror of holiness. What are we beside her? But we are not yet at the end, there is a long list of abasements: *"Beato Michaeli Archangelo,"*—what are we compared with this Prince of Angels? With St. John the Baptist? With the holy Apostles Peter and Paul? With the glorious army of all the Saints (*"et omnibus sanctis"*) which the Confiteor sets before us,—truly a refulgent ocean of purity and virtue? My God, what a contemptible culprit I am in the midst of this glorious assembly of Saints into which the *Confiteor* places me! It seems as though the Church had chosen her brightest lights to set off our shadows all the more drastically.

But we have not yet finished. *"Et vobis fratres";*—even before men we are sinners. When we say Mass at the altar, are there not, perhaps, some layfolk kneeling in the pews behind us who are much purer, humbler, holier than we,—who possess the spirit of prayer in a far higher degree,—who are readier to sacrifice their all for God, and have more courage to suffer than we? *"Vobis fratres, quia peccavi nimis";*—alas, too much and too often have we sinned. Mark well! Many priests who are now beatified and canonized have prayed at the behest of the Church: *"nimis";* a St. Francis de Sales, a St. Alphonsus, a Curé d'Ars. If even the

Saints were pardoned sinners, what about us? Let us humbly strike our breast and, with an eye upon our past, contritely say: *"Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!"* That is the true spirit of penance when we confess before God that we are poor, miserable sinners. Without this spirit all virtue is suspicious and our finest sermons have a hollow sound.

How often does not the Church make us recite the *Confiteor!* Early in the morning, at dawn, and again at the close of the day in the Compline. The Church does everything in her power to impress upon us our *maxima culpa.* If we only made good use of this opportunity to humble ourselves and acknowledge deep down in our heart that we are indeed miserable sinners! The Saints were pitiless towards themselves; a bit of this spirit at the sight of our sins would be a salutary thing for us. For it is upright confession and sincere contrition that draw down the mercy of God. If the first part of the *Confiteor* fills us with confusion and shame, then the second should uplift and comfort us. How touching and hopeful sounds the *"Ideo precor beatam Mariam semper Virginem"!* How consoling are the words in which we beseech the Mother of Mercy and the beloved Saints to intercede for us! Hear how the Church pronounces the *Misereatur* over us, how she inspires us with hope for the removal of the mountain of sins which obstruct our way,—*"et dimissis peccatis tuis perducat te ad vitam aeternam."* Relieved we may rise up and with confidence repeat the threefold word of reconciliation and forgiveness:

"indulgentiam, absolutionem et remissionem peccatorum," by which the Church appeals for us to the omnipotent and merciful God!

Thus this meditation on sin at length leads us to the *colloquium misericordiae,*—out of the depths of guilt we rise to the light of divine mercy. Ah, God is indeed merciful! He is ready to forgive us all our sins. We will close with the verse: *"Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam, et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum dele iniquitatem meam!" Miserere,* Have mercy! That is the cry of the sinful soul to God. And overwhelmed by the multitude of sins, terrified by their weight, it says: "Have mercy on me according to Thy great mercy!" [8] In view of the enormous responsibility which rests upon the priest a small measure of mercy will not suffice; we appeal to the multitude of Thy mercies, O God! The multitude of Thy mercies I invoke upon my poor soul, that Thou mayest blot out my iniquity! *"Cor contritum et humiliatum non despicies!"*

[8] *"Qui magnam misericordiam deprecatur, magnam miseriam confitetur. Quaerant parvam misericordiam tuam, qui nesciendo peccaverunt. . . . Subveni gravi vulneri secundum magnam medicinam tuam. Grave est quod habeo, sed ad Omnipotentem confugio. De meo tam letali vulnere desperarem, nisi tantum medicum reperirem."* (*Augustine, Enarr. in Ps.,* L, Sermo n. 5, 6; Migne, 36, 588.)

FOURTH MEDITATION

THE PRIEST IN HELL

THIS is a theme that needs but to be mentioned to excite the utmost horror. Before our minds arise frightful, almost insupportable images. The priest who on earth had the sorry courage to soil his priestly dignity by living in mortal sin, though consecrated to the altar, is by the justice of God consigned to hell. And we must have the courage to meditate on this monstrous picture. "Let us not shun sermons on hell, so that we may escape hell; let us not shun the mention of punishment, so that we may not be punished!" [1] Therefore, let us take heart and descend into the hell of the sinful priest.

I. *The Frightfulness of Hell for the Priest*

1. Let us first consider why hell must be so frightful for the priest. "Buried in hell," not simply consigned to or placed in hell, but *"sepultus in inferno"* (Luke XVI, 22): this pregnant word of our Saviour applies to every reprobate sinner, but in a very special manner to the damned priest. He has been cast deeper down

[1] St. Chrysostom, *In Ep. II ad Thessal.*, Hom. 2, 4; Montfauc., XI, p. 603.

into the abyss than any layman. And why? Because divine justice demands, and must demand, that the sinner's punishment should correspond to his guilt. *"Omni autem, cui multum datum est, multum quaeretur ab eo"* (Luke XII, 48). The guilt of the wicked priest is greater than that of the ordinary Christian. It is more disastrous; the loftier was his destiny, the greater were the graces given to him, the more effective the means of sanctification at his disposal, the greater the sins he has committed. In view of his excessive guilt, divine justice requires that the priest be more severely punished than the layman. He was an extraordinary sinner, therefore extraordinary punishment must be meted out to him. "As much as she hath glorified herself, and hath been given delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give unto her" (Apoc. XVIII, 7). When, therefore, the glare of hellfire falls upon a damned priest, it is a sublime illustration of divine justice. This helpless wretch is a gruesome, yet splendid glorification of the adorable justice of the Most High. May it never be your lot or mine to illustrate the dread truth that it is a terrible thing for a sinful priest to fall into the hands of an offended God! (Hebr. X, 31.)

2. Wherein does the specific frightfulness of hell consist for the priest? It consists briefly in this, that the *poena damni* and the *poena sensus* are more severe for him than for others.

(a) The *poena damni* constitutes the worst terror

of hell. We can scarcely imagine what takes place in the soul when, disenchanted from the terrestrial world and the illusions of the senses, in the loneliness of hell it contemplates the loss of the Supreme Good, realizing that there is absolutely nothing that can satisfy its thirst for happiness, beauty, and bliss. How eagerly this damned soul would rush into the arms of the Supreme Good, yet in its yearning flight it recoils before the thunderous *"discede a me, maledicte,"* and is hurled back with superhuman power into the dismal chasm, far, far removed from God! What an indescribably unfortunate state! And now consider the soul of a damned priest, who in the light of eternity understands still better than the average lay person how infinitely amiable God is, who irresistibly gravitates toward the Supreme Good, in whom everything tends to, everything inwardly longs for, impels, and cries out to God:—a consecrated soul, eternally separated from God, tossed about in this cruel whirlwind of desire for and rejection by God, what a dreadful fate! *"Oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis intravit,"* applies also here. On the one hand, the everlasting cry: *"Sitivit in te anima mea"* (Ps. LXII, 2), which in life the priest uttered so often, and which in hell has become irresistible yearning, and in answer thereto the eternal *"Discede a me, maledicte!"* (Matth. XXV, 41).

Even on earth there is something sad about an excommunicated or permanently suspended priest. He goes about among the living like a wandering corpse, an extinct star. But to be an *excommunicatus gehen-*

nae, upon whom God himself has irrevocably pronounced a curse, must be the very acme of priestly misfortune. He is separated from God, banished from the Church Triumphant and the choirs of the angels! While on earth he often recited that wonderfully consoling prayer *"Communicantes,"* in which he declared his union with the Saints in Heaven; now he would indeed like to repeat this consoling prayer, but a voice like thunder repels him: *"Discede!"* Mary, the Apostles, the Martyrs, the holy Virgins, all are far away, and between them and the unfortunate priest there is a *"chaos magnum"* (Luke XVI, 26),—the abyss of hell!

The rite of degradation, that terrible chapter in the *Pontificale Romanum,* is a veritable reversal of the rite of ordination. The bishop with mitre and crosier stands before the unworthy priest like a judge. The culprit is stripped of his priestly garments and insignia, the consecrated fingers are scraped, the Gospel-book and stole are taken away from and cast behind him. But how much more dreadful must be the eternal degradation of the priest performed by God Himself in hell. Expelled from the Kingdom of God, put out of His sight, away from the communion of light,—that is his portion! How unutterable must be the woe that pierces the soul of such a reprobate priest! It has happened that priests, who were forcibly removed from office, broke down and wept bitterly when they heard the ringing of the church bells for the last time. But that is child's play beside the hopeless misery of the damned priest, who looks back to the altars of peace at

which he once sacrificed and yearns for the blessed accents of the bells which daily invited him to the lovely sanctuary of the Lord. Instead there is now another assembly about him, and there are other *communicantes:* the demons. Once he was a terror to them. In the Order of Exorcist he was set before them as a *"spiritualis imperator";*[2] now he is an object of derision to them. Once he prayed: *"Particeps ego sum omnium timentium te"* (Ps. CXVIII, 63); now he is the associate of all who blaspheme God, chained to them inseparably and forever. Once the Alleluia of his Office rang about him, now the agonizing shrieks of hell pierce his ears.

(b) Consider, furthermore, the *poena sensus. "Ignis paratus a Deo angelis eius"* (Matth. XXV, 41). What kind of fire might that be which God has specially prepared for the reprobate sinners of the spirit world,—including the rebellious priests, for they, too, were angels? It is an *"ignis inquisitorius,"* which searches out the mark of the priestly dignity, the *"character indelebilis,"* in order to torture its possessor. He who once called down heavenly dew upon so many graves, now pants in vain for a drop of water: *"Crucior in hac flamma"* (Luke.XVI, 24). He whose life was so agreeable on earth, now writhes in a pool of fire and suffers tortures which no mortal imagination can picture.

(c) In addition to all this the gnawing *worm of*

[2] *Pontif., De Ordin. Exorcist.*

conscience, which the sinful priest so often silenced by amusements, by light literature, perhaps by drink, is untiringly active in hell. But the regret it evokes is tardy and fruitless. It is a belated cry for the beautiful years that are lost, for the streams of grace that have passed by. Ah, the priest in hell appreciates how easy it would have been for him to save himself. A little more earnestness, a little more self-denial, a little more prayer, a little more zeal, a little more discipline would have changed his fate. But it is too late now. If such a priest were permitted to return, if he could go to confession, or make a retreat, oh, how contritely would he confess his sins, how devoutly would he make the exercises! If he had only one minute at his disposal, what good use he would make of it! But it is for ever too late! *"In inferno nulla poenitentia, nec aliquis ad virtutes recursus."* [3] Hope and time are no more; there is only eternity, an unchangeable, dreadful eternity!

(d) He is eternally banished from the face of God and consigned to unending torture. What an awful fate! A certain priest who lay sick unto death and suffered much once said: "One night of such suffering is almost unbearable,—what must hell be!" We know what forty-eight hours of incessant and acute physical pain means; it is something frightful. But what is bodily disease compared with the fire of hell, which burns eternally? It is the unendingness of hell's torments which renders them so terrible. Let us

[3] St. Jerome, *In Eccles.,* c. 9, v. 7.

seriously ponder the frightful phrase, *"saecula saeculorum,"* which the Apocalypse (XIV, 11) employs with reference to hell ("The smoke of their torments shall ascend up for ever and ever") and apply it to the priest, the dethroned prince of the House of God. Let us thank God that He has preserved us till now from this greatest of all evils, and is giving us the means to escape it.

II. *The Lessons to be Derived from These Considerations*

1. Although God has so far preserved us from hell, we know that we may yet go there. Even the priest, notwithstanding his dignity and the graces with which he is endowed, is in constant danger of damnation. The Church leaves no room for doubt on this point. Permit me to remind you once more of the natal day of your priesthood. When you were ordained to the presbyterate the bishop read from the *Pontificale* an address full of sublime thoughts and high demands:—a grandiose delineation of the priestly life. At the end he said that we should live so that neither the ordaining bishop nor the ordained priest may go to hell on account of this ordination (*"quatenus nec nos de vestra provectione, nec vos de tanti officii susceptione damnari a Domino mereamur"*). In the joy of your heart you scarcely noticed the frightful vision of hell which the Church, in the midst of the ordination ceremony, thus momentarily evoked. But the fact remains that precisely on that wonderful day of your sacerdotal nup-

tials, the Church set hell before your eyes as an impressive warning. And, as if to remind us of this warning every day, she places upon our lips at each holy Mass, just before the Consecration, the solemn words: *"ut ab aeterna damnatione nos eripi iubeas."* May God deliver us, *i. e.,* the priests who stand on the luminous heights of Thabor, from eternal damnation. It seems impossible for us to fall from that glorious height on which we stand, into this gloomy abyss. Who shall tear us away *a latere Iesu?* Nevertheless, the Church teaches us to pray daily that we may be saved, and it would require a lot of unthinking routine not to see this perspective, which the Canon daily unrolls before us, as a dread possibility. These words should be pronounced tremblingly; for

2. It is indeed a danger in the priest's life to see hell only in the distance, vaguely, indistinctly. We all believe in it in theory, and admit the possibility that we may go there; but to many of us this possibility seems purely abstract. We lack a *practical* apprehension of the nearness of the danger. In our pastoral activity we are constantly dealing with graces,—with the mercy, the love, the benefactions of God. At the altar, in our meditations, and in the pulpit, we live in a certain sunshine, a kind of mild atmosphere of grace, to which we have become accustomed. In this atmosphere it is possible for the priest to lose sight of the fact that he is not yet saved.

How differently did the great *Apostle of the Gentiles* act and speak! In spite of the *"magnitudo revela-*

tionum" (2 Cor. XII, 7) that was vouchsafed to him, in spite of the superabundance of graces and charismata which he enjoyed, in spite of the wonderful successes of his apostolate, he cried out: *"Ne, cum aliis praedicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar"* (1 Cor. IX, 27). That should be an example for us. I must do all I can to escape hell; the more I preach to others, the more I correct and admonish them, the more God reveals His truths to me, the more I must preach to myself, correct myself, saturate my soul with the fear of God. Among the many petitions which we address to God in the Little Hours, one of the most important is contained in the verse: *"Confige timore tuo carnes meas"* (Ps. CXVIII, 120). The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom for all men, the priest included. The fear of offending God, especially by a mortal sin, the fear of everything that may lead to mortal sin, an intense dread of the exalted sanctity and justice of God,—let these be the accompaniments of our priestly life. *"Confige,"* says the Psalmist. It should not be merely a superficial sensation, a gentle ripple on the surface of the soul, but its very marrow should be penetrated by the fear of God. The fear of God should pierce us like a sharp sword, or, as St. Augustine[4] puts it, should "crucify" our innermost soul. In this holy fear lies our salvation! A priest's soul may be assailed by temptations so alluring and deceptive that nothing can repel them but the fear of God and of hell. In the life of a priest there are duties that are

[4] *"De quo timore crucifigi optat propheta, cum dixit: Confige etc."* (*Expos. Ep. ad Gal.*, n. 53; Migne 35, 2142.)

unpleasant, there are occasions when he must lay down principles that are unpopular with men, when nothing will avail him but the thought: If I do not speak and act thus, I will surely go to hell! This was the thought which spurred on that great Pope, Gregory VII, in his gigantic work of reform, the thought that was present to the mind of the Saints, and there are also among us priests, who, when confronted by disagreeable duties, make a meditation on hell and by means of it are enabled to overcome all weakness. "If the mere sight of a corpse can restrain our soul from evil," says St. Chrysostom, "how much more hell, the fire that cannot be extinguished and the worm that dieth not? The thought of hell induces us to do great things right; hence it is like some salutary remedy which impresses the danger upon our souls."[5]

3. We should often meditate on hell, not only during retreat, but at other times. St. Francis Borgia did it every day. We know human nature but too well. We know how weak and vacillating we are,—how we require constant restraint lest we indulge too much in exterior activities or abandon ourselves wholly to our evil impulses. We know of the *peccatum nos circumstans* (Hebr. XII, 1), we are aware of the enervating, debilitating atmosphere of the world, with its narcotic effect, its sensual charms, its levity in all things. All this compels us to employ a powerful remedy to restore the spiritual life. We must immerse our soul often and deeply in the realization of eternity and the

[5] *In 2 Ep. ad Thess.*, Hom. 2, c. 3; Montfauc., XI, 600.

endless misery of the damned. To meditate on hell is not agreeable, but *"sermo durus,"* as St. Bernard calls it,[6] *"verbum asperum, auditio mala."* Still we must consider this subject frequently. "Above all fly from punishment, avoid hell; before you desire the God who promises, beware of Him that threatens. For holy and terrible is His name." [7] The thought of hell moved many a Saint to practice all manner of austerities, including bloody flagellation. Let us at least scourge our soul by meditating on hell,—scourge it severely, if need be, till it becomes humble and docile. Thus only shall we reap the fruit which meditation on this subject should bring forth, *viz.*, the resolution to sin no more, coupled with a firm determination to lead a holy life.

[6] *In Ps. Qui habitat,* Sermo 3, 3.

[7] St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.,* CX, Sermo n. 8; Migne, 27, 1466.

FIFTH MEDITATION

DEATH AND JUDGMENT

We will now consider the last moment of the priest's earthly life and the first moment of his life in the world beyond,—in other words, death and judgment. Death we can see, though only in part; the other side, which we see not at all, is full of mysteries. Judgment is veiled entirely from our eyes, and only faith can slightly lift the veil. If the life of a priest is a thing of mystery, how much more so his death and judgment.

I. *The Death of the Priest*

1. It is absolutely certain that we shall die, and that we shall die as priests. Perhaps you have seen a priest die; or have seen him lie in his coffin, with the birretta upon his head, his rigid body garbed in a chasuble. Thus you, too, shall some day lie in a coffin, and hundreds of curious or sympathetic eyes will gaze upon your dead face. The obituary column of the newspapers will contain your name. Your fellow-priests will say: "Father so and so is dead." The obsequies will take place. Applications will be made for your parish; there will be speculation, and finally congratulations to your successor. Meanwhile, deep down in the

grave, your body will slowly decay, until at last there is left but a bare skeleton, a nameless thing. This is going to happen most certainly, and perhaps very soon. We know not when we shall die, but we know that the day cannot be far off. *"Memor esto, quoniam mors non tardat!"* (Eccli. xiv, 12.) If we know that someone who wishes to meet us is already on the way, we prepare to receive him. Death is on the way, my friend, he is coming towards us, nothing can delay him,—*non tardat,* he will soon be here and shake hands with you.

2. These truths are commonplace and simple, yet if they were vividly realized, the effect would be wonderful. The thought of death is capable of completely altering a man's way of thinking and acting. It has induced countless souls to abandon sin and embrace virtue. It has prompted thousands to give up all they possessed and follow the Lord. It could induce you, and in fact every priest, to lead a holy life.

(a) "He who always keeps the thought of death before himself easily despises all things," says St. Gregory the Great. The thought of death *disengages man from earthly things.* "The end cometh, the end cometh," warns the Prophet (Ezechiel VII, 2). What sense is there in heaping up a fortune, seeing that Death will soon gather up and carry off all your money? Death is coming: of what benefit to you will be the costly furniture piled up in your house? Death is coming: of what use to you is all that feasting, that excessive sleep, and unnecessary luxury? Death is

coming: why yield your body to the *spurcitiae carnis?* Death is coming: why seek office and authority, why pursue popularity? By one sharp jolt Death will bring your house of cards down in a heap. *"Vanitas igitur est,"* we read in the very beginning of the *Imitation of Christ,* "it is vanity to seek after riches which must perish, and to trust in them. It is vanity to be ambitious of honors and to raise oneself to a high station. It is vanity to follow the lusts of the flesh, and to desire that for which thou must afterwards be grievously punished. . . . It is vanity to love that which passeth with all speed." On the other hand, "it is the highest wisdom to despise the world and tend towards the Kingdom of Heaven." How wise could the constant thought of death render us; how could the *memento mori* make all enticements of honor, of beauty, of wealth fade away! Look at the priest who occupies himself daily with the thought of death! Does he not walk like one awake among somnambulists, like a sober man among the drunken, like a seer of the future among persons who live in and for the present? In suffering, how strong are we made by the thought: "It will not last long!" How easily can we condone insults, rude remarks, and cruel judgments if we keep before us the thought: "It will pass away! Ten or twenty years from now we shall be under the sod!" Think of the past, how much heated passion has blazed in your parish during the years of its existence! It has all passed away like smoke, and the remnants that still swirl about will soon be carried off by the wind!

(b) The thought of death not only detaches us from earthly things, but also compels us to cast anchor on the shores of eternity. When Death shows us how everything fades away, how youth, beauty, honor, influence, love are like the flush of a fever that glows for a moment, only to disappear; when we see the weeks rush by in mad haste and the years disappear behind us; when we notice that we are growing old, we know not how;—what else is left to us but to seek firmer ground, to stretch out our hands for that which is permanent and eternal,[1] what else but to open our hearts and say once again: *"Ad te Domine levavi animam meam, in te confido, non erubescam"?* It was not without a definite purpose that God surrounded us with the deadly signs of change, and that He impresses more deeply on us from year to year the dreadful sense of the utter nothingness of all earthly things. This is a proof of wisdom and a mark of love. He wishes thereby to draw us away from what is of the earth, earthly, and to attract us to himself, the Fountain of life and of never-changing beauty.

3. Therefore, my friends, *"sit mors pro doctore,"* as St. Augustine used to say. Let us sit daily at the feet of this teacher, Death, who imparts such stern, incisive, and truthful lessons. Our vocation enables us to contemplate him closely. The treasure of our priestly recollections contains the memory of many a death-bed; we know how innocence dies; we also have

[1] *"Ubi omnia stant, ubi nihil transit."* (St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.*, CXXI, Sermo n. 6; Migne 37, 1623.)

gloomy and dismal death scenes in our mind. We know it, we see it more clearly every day, more plainly than anyone else, that there is but one thing that has value here below, namely, contempt of the world and love of God. *"Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas praeter amare Deum et illi soli servire."* [2] Let us listen frequently to the sermon that is preached to us by that plot in the churchyard where our deceased predecessors lie buried. The grave of a priest is a solemn place. Does it not seem as if a voice from its depths admonished us: "The figure of this world passeth away" (1 Cor. VII, 31); "they who use this world," let them be "as if they used it not" (*ib.*); "preach the word, be instant in season, out of season"; "fulfill thy ministry"; "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. IV, 2, 5,), and "keep thyself chaste" (1 Tim. V, 22)?

The grave of a priest vividly reminds us that time is passing and that our sanctification, too, must needs be hastened: *"qui sanctus est, sanctificetur adhuc, qui iustus est iustificetur adhuc!"* (Apoc. XXII, 11). Beside the grave of your predecessors there is a vacant lot that may possibly be yours! When you chance to pass there on your way to church, or when you walk through the graveyard now and then, stop for a moment, descend into this future grave of yours, into the depths of your future eternity;—and then go and make good use of your time and perform your priestly duties conscientiously, while you are still alive and able. "Learn where is wisdom, where is strength, where is

[2] *Imitat. Chr.*, I, 1.

understanding, . . . where is the light of the eyes, and peace" (Baruch III, 14).

This is what the certainty of death should teach us: to fly from earthly things and to devote ourselves whole-heartedly to the service of God.

II. *God's Judgment of the Priest*

"Post mortem iudicium" (Hebr. IX, 27). Holy Scripture often expresses the greatest and most solemn truths in the simplest language. The words *"post mortem iudicium"* are very simple, but what a vista they open to us behind the curtain of death!

1. Who is the *Judge?* He is Jesus Christ—not our Saviour, but our Judge. It is not the sweet, lovely Infant of Bethlehem, not the amiable Boy of Nazareth, not the gentle Lord who invited to Himself all that labored and were laden; but it is the Son of Man, as St. John describes Him in the Apocalypse, whose eyes are ablaze with fire, whose voice is like the sound of many waters, and from whose mouth comes a two-edged sword,—so terrible a vision that the beloved disciple, who had once familiarly rested upon Christ's bosom, falls as dead at His feet (Apoc. I, 13 ff.). When we read the seven apocalyptic letters, we see a judgment passed upon the priest, which in a certain sense is a prelude of the judgment to come after death. In His expostulation with the angels of the churches, the Saviour displays unwonted severity. How much

more severe will He be in the hereafter, where, as Judge, He will measure everything according to the weights of the sanctuary (Lev. V, 15), in the scales of implacable justice? "I entreat thee to be merciful to thy soul! Believe that the Son of God will be the Judge!" [3] A great many of the excuses which we proffer now will then melt away like mist before the sun.

2. What will be the subject-matter of the judgment? Our whole life,—as laymen, as students, as priests. The great Judge will ask: *"Quomodo intrasti?"* The way that led you to the gates of the sanctuary lies open before His glance. He surveys the time of your priesthood,—a long time, perhaps, crowded with innumerable holy Masses, Sacraments administered, hours of prayer, hosts of thoughts that passed through your mind, words spoken and actions performed. *"Quomodo vixisti?"* He will ask: "How did you live in the priesthood?" Then comes the judgment upon your labors in the vineyard: *"Quomodo rexisti?"* What an extensive accounting, how large the debit-book, how many deficits and imperfections! With fear and trembling will you expect the answer to these questions: *Quomodo intrasti? Quomodo vixisti? Quomodo rexisti?* (St. Gregory the Great). The holiest and best priests have trembled in anticipating them and dreaded the approaching scrutiny. With a layman the judgment may be, humanly speaking, easier; but with us priests the examination will extend

[3] St. Jerome, *Ep. 48 ad Sabian. Diacon. Increpatoria.*

to our flocks. What will the issue be! "Let us ponder," says the Pope St. Gregory the Great, "how much gain we have made for God, who sent us to barter after giving us a talent. Truly He said: 'Trade till I come' (Luke XIX, 13). Behold, He comes now and demands His share of the profits from our business! What gain in souls can we show? What sheaves from the crop of our preaching can we bring before Him?" "Woe to us," the holy Pontiff adds,[4] "if after engaging in business, we should return to God empty-handed; if we who had the name of shepherds, have no sheep to show as the result of our feeding! Here we are called shepherds, and there we lead no flock." Ah, if the soul of this or that person should be demanded of us, whom we have neglected, misled, scandalized; if sins of omission or undue haste, so many shortcomings and inadvertences should stand against us; if a long sullen procession of accusers rise to blame us:—*"quid sum miser tunc dicturus?"* Do we not occasionally, in hours of solitude, experience

[4] The passage refers especially to the last judgment; it is preceded by these splendid sentences: *"In illo tanto examine . . . unusquisque, quid sit operaturus, ostendit. Ibi Petrus cum Iudaea conversa, quam post se traxit, apparebit. Ibi Paulus conversum, ut ita dicam, mundum ducens. Ibi Andreas post se Achaiam, ibi Ioannes Asiam, Thomas Indiam in conspectu sui Iudicis conversam ducet. Ibi omnes dominici gregis arietes cum animarum lucris apparebunt, qui sanctis suis praedicationibus Deo post se subditum gregem trahunt. Cum igitur tot pastores cum gregibus suis ante aeterni pastoris oculos venerint, nos miseri quid dicturi sumus, qui ad Dominum nostrum post negotium vacui redimus, qui pastorum nomen habuimus et oves, quae ex nutrimento nostro debeamus ostendere, non habemus?"* (*Hom. in Evang.*, XVII.)

in our souls something like ominous flashes from another world?

3. Should we not do whatever lies in our power to turn God's judgment in our favor? Let us judge ourselves severely: "Let us daily make a reckoning with ourselves, as we shall make with our Judge," St. Gregory again exhorts us.[5] Step before your Judge now, and hear what He has to say. What if the charge should be: "This I have against thee, that thou hast left thy *first charity?*" (Apoc. II, 4)! Oh, what a grand thing it would be to present ourselves to the Judge with this "first charity" of our sacerdotal life, the freshness of our early fervor still aglow in our souls! My brother, shouldst thou no longer possess this fervor, *"memor esto, unde excideris et age poenitentiam, et prima opera fac!"*[6] Ah, those "first works" of our priestly youth, our first Masses, our first meditations, our early life of zeal,—how far they lie behind us, and how kindly they greet us when we recall them! Let us return to them while there is still time!

What if the charge should be: "I know that thou art neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm; . . . thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked"? (Apoc. III, 15, 17). What a predicament to appear thus before the eternal Judge after a life of lukewarmness,—that malignant disease which eats away the marrow of the soul,

[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.* v. 5.

that most sinister of all conditions, in which one feels nothing, notices nothing, and lives on thoroughly satisfied with oneself,—without longing, without sorrow! It is like a hectic flush in which one goes to one's death with a seemingly healthy color! O Priest of God, if this should be your condition,—and who is not aware that it can easily fasten itself on a priest's heart?—then cast off this miserable languor before you are called by the Judge! Disengage yourself from lukewarmness, purchase the gold tried by fire, and clothe yourself in white garments (Apoc. III, 18).

What if the Great Judge should say: "These things saith He who hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead"! (Apoc. III, 1). Truly, there could be no doubt about what the priest would have to do then. *Nomen habes, quod vivas.* He is listed in the Catholic Directory and the diocesan bede-rôle, he wears the priestly garb, he goes to the altar, does all things becomingly, preaches and instructs the people, is esteemed a worthy member of the priesthood,—and yet: *"mortuus est"!*—in God's unerring sight he is dead! What a spectacle before God and His Angels:—a priest who walks before them like a corpse and, himself spiritually dead, dispenses the life-giving Sacraments; who calls down the Lord of life from Heaven upon the altar, humbly bows his knees before Him, and leads Him into his dead soul! How will he appear at the dread moment of judgment, when the all-seeing eye of the Judge flashes into the abyss of his soul?

St. Bernard says: "The proud man excuses, the humble accuses himself, knowing that God does not judge twice in the same matter, and 'if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged' " (1 Cor. XI, 31). Whatever may be the outcome of the judgment which we perform upon ourselves by a thorough examination of conscience, let us accept the result, and with priestly candor lay it down in the tribunal of Penance,—that *tribunal misericordiae* which disarms the anger of God and turns away the judgment to come. And let us continue this practice throughout life: make a daily examination of conscience and, if possible, go weekly to confession and not spare ourselves. Amid all the vicissitudes of life, amid the noise of business and the bustle of society, let us fix our mind frequently upon the great, silent, solemn hour of judgment and daily appeal to our Judge: *"Domine Jesu, non esto mihi iudex, sed salvator!"*

SIXTH MEDITATION

GOD'S MERCY TO THE PRIEST

THE truths of which we treated in the last discourses are called *via purgativa.* In pondering them we go through a course of purgation, a real *purgatorium, i. e.,* a painful cleansing fire in which the soul is purged from sin. As the bright stars of the Milky Way have behind them a dark background that extends into immeasurable space, so behind the truths of the *via purgativa* stretches the illimitable, sombre background of eternity. And as the soul is immortal, it is in its natural element on this journey, though ever so lonely, with only the horizon of eternity above it.

Undeniably there is something oppressive about these truths. Looking into the dismal depths of an unhappy eternity, the soul shudders and asks: *"What will my fate be?"* This most weighty of all questions arises impetuously in our heart, as it finds itself surrounded on all sides by the infinite justice of God.

But through the gloom there beams upon us a hopeful star,—*Misericordia,* the mercy of God! How often does the Church permit us, at Holy Mass and in reciting the Breviary, to pronounce this glorious word! *"Misericordia Domini plena est terra"* (Ps. XXXII, 5), we pray in the Introit of the Mass which contains the Gospel of the Good Shepherd on the second Sunday

after Easter; *"misericordia tua, Domine, plena est terra"* (Ps. CXVIII, 64) we frequently repeat in reciting the Little Hours.

The word *misericordia* appears as if it had been coined for us priests. We, more than other men, live on the mercy of God all the days of our life. To receive the necessary courage to perform His work resolutely, let us meditate on the divine mercy. We can pursue the traces of divine mercy all through our life, and seeing everywhere the gleam of mercy's golden thread holding the entire fabric together, we shall in the end, full of solace, raise our head and say to ourselves, that we may trust in the mercy of the Lord in the future as we have done in the past, and confidently do our duty.

I. *God's Mercy in Calling us to the Priesthood*

When the Patriarch Jacob at the end of his earthly pilgrimage blessed his young grandsons and at the same time cast a glance over his past life, he uttered this beautiful sentiment: *"Deus, qui pascit me ab adolescentia mea"* (Gen. XLVIII, 15). Let us follow his example! If we wish to realize God's mercy in our life, we must go back to our youth and fix our eyes first of all upon that great event,—our vocation to the clerical state.

1. How it happened that we became priests we ourselves do not fully understand. Too many threads run together,—visible and invisible, human, natural, and

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supernatural, often seemingly entangled; but one day, in Heaven, we shall behold with rapture that our vocation to the priesthood was part of a marvelous *plan of grace,* conceived and executed by wisdom and love, and especially by mercy, forbearance, and condescension. Notwithstanding the aberrations, the general unworthiness and infidelity of our youth, God never tired in leading us to our exalted calling. "Whatsoever we are, we are by His mercy, but whatsoever we are by ourselves, we are evil." [1] I have often been thrilled in witnessing how a young man whom I was preparing for ordination suddenly realized the depths of God's mercy in seeking him out for the priesthood.

2. This is really a meditation which everyone must make in the light of his own experience. There are, however, two points that will serve all of us alike as proofs of God's mercy: the one is our *removal from the world,* which would certainly have become dangerous to us; the other, *our call to a vocation that leads us gently to salvation.* What would have become of us had we remained out in the world? What guarantee have we that we should not, like so many others, including, perhaps, some of our schoolmates, have strayed from the faith or become wholly engrossed in temporal and earthly pursuits, bent upon gaining wealth and other earthly things, and hence exposed to the most terrible dangers? Who knows if marriage would not

[1] St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.,* LXX, Sermo 1, n. 2; Migne, 36, 876.

have proved our undoing? The humbler we are, the louder we will confess: It is the mercy of the Lord that called me to the sacerdotal state and thereby preserved me from numberless occasions of sin. It is the mercy of the Lord that erected a mighty barrier between me and the world, the *"character indelebilis"* of the priesthood, which is in a certain sense insurmountable. It is the mercy of the Lord that directed me to a calling which released me from worldly affairs, drove me as it were by force into the arms of God, and opened for me, in the daily intercourse with Him, a new world full of beauty, loveliness, and comfort. *"Ubique misericordia eius praevenit nos, ut vocaremur."* [2] Therefore, *"confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus!"* (Ps. CXXXV, 1). God is good; He meant it well with me in choosing me for a state that corresponds so wonderfully to the innermost peculiarities and needs of my nature.

II. *God's Mercy as Manifested in the Life of the Priest*

Let us consider the mercy of God as manifested in our priestly life. Mercy led us into the sanctuary; mercy directed our whole sacerdotal career. Here is a rich field for meditation, affording many opportunities for individual application.

1. It is meet that we should first of all consider

[2] St. Augustine, Sermo 1903, *al. De Diversis,* 58, 2; Migne, 38, 1015.

the shadowy side of life, *our sins.* "Priests," says an ancient author,[3] "are men of flesh and blood, and we, too, who sit in the chair and teach, are subject to sin. . . . The more we excel in dignity, the more easily are we enmeshed in guilt." The duties of the priest are so numerous, his responsibilities so manifold and weighty, that, notwithstanding the abundance of graces which are showered upon him, he is liable to fall into many sins. "Who is so bold and blind as to say that he has no sin?" writes St. Lawrence Justiniani. "If we could complete our pilgrimage without failing, the Lord would have done an unnecessary thing when He taught us to pray, 'Forgive us our trespasses.'"[4] What a terrible sight our sins represent! Many a one upon entering the priesthood thought that the danger of sin in his life was now over; but, alas, there came another period instead, filled with sins of another kind, perhaps even worse in some respects because of his superior dignity and the greater grace which God gave him. If we had a servant who resembled us in our relation to God, we should long ago have discharged him; how is it, then, that God tolerates us, that we are still here, stand every day at the altar, put the chalice to our lips, without being called to account? Ah, that is due to His mercy! *"Misericordia Domini, quia non sumus consumpti"* (Lament. III, 22). He never wearies in showing mercy. Whilst He pardoned the penitent thief, Peter, and

[3] *Hom. in SS. Petrum et Heliam, inter Opera S. Chrysost.*, Montfauc., II, 872 f.

[4] *De Spirit. Animae Resurrect.*, L, II, Venet. 1721, p. 457.

Magdalen, *once,* He pardoned us innumerable times, and upon His divine mercy, that floods the face of the earth, we make copious demands by our sins,—demands that are met by an inexhaustible generosity. As the sun drives away the night, so does the mercy of God dispel our sins.

2. Consider how pitifully *imperfect* is the *service* which we render to God. He taught His Apostles, who were Saints of the first rank, to say: "We are unprofitable servants" (Luke XVII, 10). What shall *we* say? What value has *our* service in His eyes? How unwillingly do we perform our *servitium,* with what ill-humor, fickleness, and selfish greed, how little like the heroism of the Saints;—and yet God magnanimously accepts so unamiable a service! He calls us friend, brother, and daily admits us to His Holy Banquet. He sees how indifferently, how offensively, how coldly His priests treat Him in holy Mass, and yet day by day He says with undiminished friendliness: "With desire have I desired to eat this pasch with you" (Luke XXII, 15). What else can we call this but a superabundance of mercy?

3. If we furthermore consider how many *graces* God has imparted to us; if we add together the number of times we have received Sacraments, the thousands of confessions we have made, and the Communions we have received, and then ask ourselves: What is the fruit of this enormous influx of grace into our soul? What has God profited from this lavish sowing?—we must say in all sincerity that it has been pro-

portionately little. But God is satisfied with this small harvest, declares us worthy of eternal life, honors us by giving us a glorious place in Heaven. Truly, that is mercy! And what else but clemency shall we call it when the Lord, who has a thousand profusely blooming, productive plants in His vineyard, nevertheless does not fling away our puny vine, but again, and again supplies it with the sap of His grace and patiently awaits the time when He will be able to pluck sweet grapes therefrom? That indeed is mercy!

4. Let us also recall to mind the many joys and *consolations* which God has poured out upon us during our priestly life. He knows that we are weak, whimsical children, and so He treats us gently. Yes, indeed, as the Prophet says, the Lord tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. He knows our delicate spiritual constitution is unable to bear a heavy load, and treats us accordingly. He has removed from our path so many stones upon which better priests than we have bruised their feet; has spared us so many crosses, under which other priests groan, because our shoulders are too weak. He has spared us the bitter trial of spiritual barrenness and years of aridity, which He has inflicted upon so many holy men, and constantly entices us by consolations, by delicious joys of the spirit, by sweetness in prayer and in His service. Who does not recognize in this the kind indulgence of a loving Father?

5. Let us look at our *sufferings*. One and all they

are tokens of His mercy! "And when the Lord permits or causes us to be in tribulation, even then is He merciful." [5] The trials He sends us may be *chastisements,* and then they are merciful chastisements. A sickness comes upon you;—will you not beware of uttering the platitude: "How have I deserved this?" Or, "Why must this happen to me?" St. Camillus of Lellis called his serious illness *"misericordia Domini."* What an opportunity to do penance for your sins, to lessen the pains of Purgatory! Or, perhaps, your sufferings are *trials,* helpful to the soul and to your spiritual progress, a bitter medicine offered by a merciful hand. Some undertaking in which you placed full confidence miscarries; others laugh or grumble at you;—how disagreeable; and yet, what a merciful antidote for your pride, what a wholesome lesson not to trust too much in yourself! Or, you have some sad experience which brings home to you the lesson that gratitude is a flower that may flourish on your grave, but not while you live. You learn how few true friends you have; that spite and ill-will surround you like a heavy atmosphere; that as you advance in years you are becoming lonelier. Recognize in this, O Priest, a mark of divine mercy, which aims to set you free from terrestrial attachments and to put you in touch with the only friend of your soul, your God! Or, some priest, forgetful of his duty and dignity, abandons himself to sin, but does not find what he hoped for, but, on the contrary, experiences bitterness, embarrassment, loss of his

[5] St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.,* LXVIII, Sermo 2, n. 1; Migne 36, 854.

good name, danger to his position, or still heavier trials. O my brethren, there is mercy in all this! God is merely making the poor priest disgusted with sin and seeking to bring him back to His duty. St. Augustine says of his own sins: "Thou wast there, O Lord, mercifully irate, by strewing bitterness upon my illicit pleasures."[6] Or the *taedium vitae,* discontent, dissatisfaction takes hold of a priest, who for a time has led a lukewarm life, so that he is forced to confess with the faithless Israelites, who had practiced idolatry on the mountains and hills, and had been dreadfully disappointed in their expectations: "In very deed the hills were liars, and the multitude of the mountains: truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel" (Jerem. III, 23). Is it not a merciful argument *ex absurdo* by which God shows him that he cannot go on thus? Often the mercy of God allows us to be disappointed in our disorderly life, so as to make us impatient of it and say: "This cannot continue; I shall be unhappy unless I become more zealous."—"Behold, all these things God worketh, that He may draw souls from corruption and enlighten them with the light of the living" (Job XXXIII, 29 f.).

Our sufferings are not only a means of reform and amendment, they are also a *means of increasing our merits.* The mystics used to say that no horse carries one quicker to Heaven than suffering. If you have to suffer, it is a reassuring sign that God thinks of you

[6] *"Nam tu semper aderas misericorditer saeviens et amarissimis aspergens offensionibus omnes illicitas iucunditates meas, ut ita quaererem sine offensione incundari."* (*Confess.,* II, 2.)

and loves you. Suffering is the hidden requisite for success in your pastoral work. If we are permitted to season our priestly labors with the salt of tribulation, what a great favor from God, who wishes us to be successful workers in His vineyard! Suffering augurs well for the success of our work. "Thank God, here comes a cross!" says many a good priest, and humbly kisses the merciful hand that sends it. "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you shall fall into divers temptations" (James I, 2).

III. *God's Mercy at the Priest's Death*

1. What shall I say, finally, of God's mercy towards the priest when the time comes for him to die? His death-bed, too, overflows with the *misericordia Domini.* God, who has ordered all things in number and weight (Wisd. XI, 21), has also fixed the hour of our death. Let us look forward confidently to that hour, for the divine mercy has decided upon this moment as the one best adapted to us. It is mercy combined with wisdom which has chosen for us the nature of our *last sickness,* which has allotted to us the weight of suffering to be endured on the way to eternity. Who is able to penetrate the operations of divine mercy in the soul at the *hour of death?* The hour of death, with its hidden and mysterious happenings, is an hour of mercy which will crown and complete all the merciful works of God manifested throughout our life. Once more the tribunal of mercy is set up beside our death-bed, and Heaven bows down with graces. The

wonderful Sacrament of Extreme Unction, the final absolution, the plenary indulgence, the prayers of the Church, the sacramentals administered in the last hour, all are so many streams of mercy bursting from the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Is not the *"Proficiscere anima Christiana"* full of most stirring tones of mercy? In this prayer Heaven comes down to us, the jubilating crowd of the angels seems to surge around us, the celestial alleluias echo in our ears. Is not that a continuation of the consoling exhortations of God in that final hour? The *"Proficiscere,"* addressed to the priest on his death-bed, thus becomes the final, joyful chord of the intimate *colloquium misericordiae* that takes place between God and the soul in the last hour. Not until the last notes have died away, not until the last sigh has been breathed, and the Church has called her *Subvenite,*—not until then have we reached the end of God's mercy.

2. Then for the moment mercy will give way to *justice;* but the sentence of the Judge will again be tempered by mercy. *"Non derelinquet misericordiam suam"* (Eccli. XLVII, 24). What will that sentence be? God grant that we shall be able to say with Lacordaire upon his death-bed: "I know I shall have to go to Purgatory." We shall accept this sentence with resignation, nay, we shall look upon it as a grace, a blessing, a favor,—in a word, as the last astounding manifestation of divine mercy. We shall extol that mercy which created Purgatory as a means of enabling imperfect creatures to reach Heaven.

Is it not true, then, that the Mercy of God is the constant companion of our priesthood, that it clings to our heels, walks in our footsteps? *"Et misericordia subsequetur me omnibus diebus vitae meae"?* (Ps. XXII, 6). It is beyond comprehension what God finds in us that He follows us so untiringly; but it is nevertheless a fact,—the great consoling fact of our life. The many trials of this earthly pilgrimage, the monotony of this mundane life, are made endurable by the cheering hymn: *"Confitemini Domino, quoniam bonus, quoniam in saeculum misericordia eius!"* (Ps. CXVII, 1). *"O vox misericordiae, O auditus laetitiae salutaris!"* [7] As yet we do not see the whole, we have only a few fragments in our hands; but when we shall see it all, perceive the meaning of all the great visitations of our life:—what a mighty symphony, what an unending pæan of praise for the mercy of God shall we intone! Then only shall we be able, with full knowledge, in rapturous understanding, by the aid of the light of glory, to sing: *"Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo"* (Ps. LXXXVIII, 2).

If this be true, then we may trust in the mercy of God now. "Reveal to me in the morning Thy mercy, because I have hoped in Thee, O Lord. For, hope alone attains mercy before Thee, neither dost Thou pour the oil of mercy except into a hopeful vessel." [8] Let us confide in His mercy, which has supported us to this day, has borne with us, has guided us hither, and will receive us in the tribunal of penance with

[7] St. Bernard, *In Annunciat. B.M.V.*, Sermo 3, 3.
[8] St. Bernard, *l. c.*

open arms, accept the confession of our sins, our protestations of amendment, and the promise of new zeal! *"Tempus acceptabile, dies salutis"* (2 Cor. VI, 2) have once more been granted us by the clemency of God. Gently He knocks at the door of our soul: *"Aperi mihi, soror mea, amica mea"* (Cantic. V, 2). *"Hiems transiit,"* winter has passed, the ice is melting. *"Vox turturis audita est,"* the voice of your love for the Saviour is heard. *"Flores apparuerunt,"* bright flowers spring from the priestly heart and breathe their fragrance heavenward (*ib.*, II, 11, 12). Let us, then, permit ourselves to be seized by the swelling torrent of divine grace and to be borne to the tribunal of penance, there to recover that peace which the world cannot give (John XIV, 27).

SEVENTH MEDITATION

JESUS CHRIST

At the beginning of this new meditation let us recall to mind once more the great truth concerning our last end. Our end is something that is far above and beyond us, and to which we must submit. But because our end is the infinite God, we must ask ourselves: "How can we reach this end?" The answer is: Through Jesus Christ. He is the solution of all questions. *"Ego via,"* He says of Himself (John XIV, 6). Humanity's way to God is through Jesus Christ. This truth applies in a special manner to the priest. More than any other man he is dependent on Jesus Christ. The strictest, most intimate organic connection with Him is a vital law of the priesthood. Let us bear in mind that the Saviour addressed the beautiful parable of the vine and the branches primarily to His Apostles (John xv). He is the vine, and we priests of the present day are its latest offshoots. How many priestly branches has this prolific vine put forth in the past? If we would be like them, we must grow wholly together with Jesus Christ, draw strength from Him, and form one organism with Him. Thus, union with our Saviour constitutes the supreme law and primary requisite of our priestly

life. It is the one great theme of all spiritual exercises. That theme may be diversified, of course, but its fundamental note remains ever the same: *"Ego vitis, vos palmites; sine me nihil potestis facere."* We admit this truth, but do we put it consistently into practice? Is not our connection with the Saviour too superficial? Yet the right relation to Christ is the great lever of our entire priestly life. We must ever keep our eyes on Christ, contemplate Him, learn to know Him better, love Him more and more, closely copy Him in our life. In the following meditations we shall, therefore, consider Christ, our great Leader and Commander, first in His *person* and secondly in His *realm*.

I. *The Person of Christ*

We will dwell here only upon one point, namely, the attractiveness, the *amiability* of Christ.

1. The personality of Christ possesses a charm that strongly attracts all souls to Him. In the Roman Catacombs we frequently see Orpheus depicted with his lyre. The early Church, under the pressure of persecution, sought solace in this image, regarding the Saviour as the celestial Orpheus, whose charming personality draws all men to Himself. At this very moment, while I am speaking to you, Heaven feels the charm that emanates from Jesus. All who see Him there in His undisguised beauty and amiability are fascinated by Him. In the lives of the Saints apparitions of Christ are of frequent occurrence. When the Saints obtain a glimpse of Him, they are beside them-

selves with rapture. We read in the life of St. Frances of the Five Wounds that the Saviour often appeared to her as "Don Salvatore." Whenever this mysterious Don Salvatore appeared in some picture by the wayside, St. Frances could no longer restrain herself, but, forgetting everything, ran after Him. St. Teresa, who frequently saw the Saviour in her visions, said she could think of nothing but His beauty.

2. But these are lofty mystical paths we are treading; let us descend from them to the more familiar walks of practical theology. Here again we are shown a most attractive personality suffused with the halo of *Divinity*. God is supreme, sovereign beauty, overwhelming loveliness, which compels homage from all. If He appeared on earth in all His beauty even for one minute, business would come to a standstill, all men would rapturously rush towards Him. In Christ we have a human nature completely immersed in Divinity. The very word "Christ," *i. e.*, the Anointed, breathes an incomparably sweet fragrance. Here we have a human body and a human soul which are so intimately united with the Divinity that earthly espousal in the Sacrament of Matrimony is but a faint shadow of this sublime Hypostatic Union. Here is a soul enriched with the highest, the most comprehensive graces and gifts of the Holy Ghost, with marvelous charismatic endowments, with a wealth of grace beyond compare. The knowledge of a genius among men is but a pale reflection of His transcendent knowledge. His Sacred Heart is of such

depth, magnanimity, and tenderness as is found in none other. His character is so perfect, so beautiful, so well balanced, so wondrously harmonious, so humble without weakness, so courageous and energetic without ever betraying harshness or precipitation that we behold in Him a perfect personality.

No wonder that the prophetic author of the 44th Psalm, having the image of the Messianic King before his eyes, felt his heart overflowing and his tongue become like the pen of a scrivener that writeth fast; no wonder that the Apostles, carried away by His personality, followed Him without hesitation, that the multitudes, "pleased by His address as well as His appearance," [1] followed Him into the desert and stayed with Him though they had no food or drink (Mark ch. VI); no wonder that they clung to this Man, who had the gift of speech as none other (Matth. VII, 29), and hung upon His lips that "dropped honey and choice myrrh." (Cant. V. 13).

3. Could we find a more attractive subject for study and meditation than this divine personality? How delightful to plunge into the beautiful depths of His divine and human perfections! "What shall we offer you that is sweeter?" asks St. Bernard.[2] "Nothing that is desirable can be compared with this sweetness." By all means let us learn to know our Saviour better! We priests especially know Him far too little. Let us study Him where He is set before our eyes

[1] St. Bernard, *In Fest. Omn. Sanct.*, Sermo 1, 4.
[2] *Ibid.*

(Gal. III, 1),—in the Gospels, in the Letters of the Apostles, in the Apocalypse. Let us study His glorious intellect, as it is revealed on every page of the Gospels; His Heart, whose pulsations we feel through the sacred text. The Gospel is the daily newspaper of the priest, in which he can constantly discover something novel and deep, something he had not known before. The better we know Him, the more we shall love Him, and the more enthusiastic we shall grow over Him. Man is so constituted that, when a personality of overpowering genius reveals itself to him, he will pay willing homage to it. Why should he not, therefore, pay homage to the Saviour, who is so much better, higher, and holier than others? Οὐ ἄμεινον οὐδὲν, says St. Ignatius Martyr,[3] "there is nothing better than He." The deeper we enter into His innermost nature, the greater will be the faith, love, and enthusiasm with which we recite the conclusion of the Gloria: *"Tu solus sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus, Iesu Christe, in gloria Dei Patris."*

4. Nor is this all. Christ is not only before our eyes in our meditations, *He also lives in our soul by sanctifying grace.* "[*Christus*] *ipse manet et habitat in nobis,*" St. Cyprian says. This mystery, which is the very essence of Christianity, is not sufficiently understood even by us priests. A few decades ago the Church lost a man who lived in and by this mytery,—I mean Cardinal Manning. The spiritual presence of

[3] *Ep. ad Magnes.*, c. 7.

Christ was to him a living reality, the dominating principle, the key to his interior life. His union with the Saviour was so intimate that he never felt alone. Christ was the very groundwork of his labors, the fountain-head from which he drew light, courage, strength, peace, and consolation. He seemed always to speak, to act, to live as though he saw Him who is invisible.

What a salutary thought for us: Christ, the God-Man, the delight of Heaven and earth, is always mysteriously in me, united with my soul by sanctifying grace! What could not this thought, this consciousness make of us! What an inward source of sweetness, of consolation, of unction it is,—a living spring which nothing but mortal sin can choke! How much more fresh and direct, how impressively fascinating would our relation to the Saviour become if this consciousness animated us: Externally it is I, internally it is the Lord Jesus! *"Vivo autem iam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus"* (Gal. II, 20).[4]

It would surely be a beautiful fruit of this meditation if the idea of Christ's indwelling in us would become the principle of our interior life.

[4] "Therefore He took the name *Christus* that we, too, be anointed with the same oil with which He was anointed, and be Christs, as it were, one essence and one body with Him; for the Sanctifier, so it is said (Hebr. II, 11), and all who are sanctified, are of One." (Marcarius, *Hom., 43,* 1).—*"Ergo gratulemur et agamus gratias, non solum nos christianos factos esse, sed Christum. Intelligite, fratres, gratiam Dei super nos capitis? Admiramini, gaudete, Christus facti sumus."* (St. Augustine, *Tr. in Ioann.,* 21, 8; Migne, 35, 1568.)

II. *The Realm of Christ*

"Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages" (Ps. CXLIV, 13). It is a magnificent realm, extending backward to Paradise and forward to eternity.

"Et regni eius non erit finis" (Luke I, 33). It is like a tower resting upon the mighty substructure of the Old Testament and rising into distant ages. In the Prophecies and Psalms there are splendid descriptions which portray this realm of Christ, its foundation on the top of the mountain, and how all nations flock unto it (Is. II, 2 ff.). When the Saviour came and actually founded this realm, He chose us among its future leaders. *"Non vos me elegistis, sed ego elegi vos"* (John XV, 16). What a privilege to be selected by the Saviour as a co-worker in His realm, to share in His interests, His work, His battles, His victories, and, in the end, also in His glory! This is the highest calling that can be open to any man!

2. From these considerations flow a number of practical lessons. First of all, we should be *joyful in our vocation.* Our highest model is Jesus Christ Himself. "Then I said: Behold I come to do Thy will, O God" (Hebr. X, 7, 9). With what joy, with what gladsome courage did not the Saviour undertake the work of establishing His realm! No unpleasant experience could deter Him; in His labors He encountered brutal opposition from His enemies, pitiable weakness on the part of His friends, but nothing could discourage Him. He never lost faith in His realm or in His

cause. The same spirit we see in His Apostles and other holy priests. There is something wondrously joyful and fresh about their work. They are always at the post of duty, always ready to jump into the breach, to sail into the storm, to go into the fire. They never lose faith in their mission. On the other hand, how many priests lack this joy in the pursuit of their vocation! To some the priestly life becomes mere drudgery. A heavy, listless atmosphere hangs over their day's work year in and year out. How wearisome this must be! One could understand it if the work of a priest resembled worldly employment. It is not surprising if a workingman loses interest in the monotony of factory work, if an accountant wearies of figures and columns, a lawyer of legal formulas. But the work of a priest is radically different. It is not earthly, but heavenly. He does not deal with lifeless figures, but with immortal souls. His work is in a vineyard irrigated by the Precious Blood of Christ. What a sublime calling to be allowed to labor for the highest interests of immortal souls, to communicate truth and grace to others, and to make them happy in the true sense of the word! How beautiful, interesting, and attractive is the care of souls when seen in this light! The work of rescuing and strengthening souls, of helping them to make progress, keeps the inner faculties alert and thus maintains in us a lively interest. How inspiring is the thought that no matter where we may be stationed, we are working for the glorious Kingdom of Christ! Would that every priest, even though he must live in isolation, as is often the case,

kept fresh within his soul the consciousness of belonging to this magnificent Kingdom, of serving a cause which the noblest representatives of the human race have deemed it an honor to serve during the past nineteen hundred years,—a cause which to-day in all parts of the world is engaged in fierce battles and achieving glorious triumphs! May this lofty, divine idea uphold, enliven, and refresh us amid the miseries and bitterness attending our pastoral work. We are fighting for the victorious cause of Jesus Christ. Let us daily exclaim: *"Sursum corda!"* Let us try to rise above the narrow, lowly notion of our calling to the thought of the *"regnum omnium saeculorum,"* the glorious realm of Jesus Christ! Remember His words: *"Posui vos ut eatis!"* (John XV, 16). You have been "going" for years, perhaps decades; oh, go on with fresh courage and do your work regardless of worries and disappointments! You are working with thousands of other members of a community which embraces everything that is beautiful, grand, and sublime, as an associate of all the priests, Apostles, Prophets, and Patriarchs who have been or will be called to this magnificent work. *"Particeps ego sum omnium timentium te"* (Ps. CXVIII, 63);—may we not, in the midst of our daily occupations repeat with gladness this verse from Tierce?

3. Christ requires of us *fidelity to our vocation,* that is to say, a complete and constant consecration of our whole being to His interests and those of His Church. With regard to the realm of Christ the

priest must be absolutely loyal, *i. e.,* he must unreservedly devote his whole personality, all that he is and has, to this noble cause. The Apostle complains: "All seek the things that are their own, not the things that are Jesus Christ's" (Philipp. II, 21). I must confess that my mind has often dwelt upon this passage, which is verified every day. *"Fortasse laboriosum non est homini relinquere sua,"* says St. Gregory the Great,[5] *"sed valde laboriosum est relinquere seipsum."* Yes, if we examine ourselves in the light of this Apostolic utterance, we shall find that in much of our vocational work we really, though perhaps unconsciously, seek ourselves, and relegate the cause of Christ to second place. One priest attaches undue importance to money, another to an empty honor or a bit of glory, another to comfort and ease, or to private study, or to some hobby. *"Quae sua sunt quaerunt, non quae Iesu Christi."* Oh, let us think less of our own well-being, and more of the cause, the honor, the realm of Jesus Christ, to which we are vowed to sacrifice ourselves! How much good is left undone, how much discord, jealousy, aloofness, how much contemptible bickering is there among priests because of self-interest! Hear the severe words which the Saviour hurls at such conduct: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me" (*non est me dignus*) Matth. X, 37). What a terrible misfortune would it be if our Lord were to cast off a priest with these words: "You are not worthy of Me. I came to save that which was lost (Matth. XVIII, 11), but you seek your-

[5] *In Evang. Homil. 32.*

self and your temporal interests. You are not worthy of Me, not worthy to fight under My banner or to bear the name of a priest of Christ." Let us ask the Lord to give us a whole-souled devotion to His cause!

4. Our devotion to Christ must be *constant.* As in the interior life, so also in our pastoral zeal, there must be no ebb and flood, the high tide of youthful zeal followed by a low tide in old age. Zeal is love of which it is written: "Charity never faileth" (1 Cor. XIII, 8), or, as St. Gregory the Great says, "Love of God is never idle. It works great things if it is active; but if it ceases its activity, it is not love."[6] The Saints shame us by the constancy of their zeal, which, even beneath the snow of old age, evinces an ardent desire for the salvation of souls, and, in spite of progressive decay of the body, preserves the perpetual youth of a soul aglow for the realm of Christ. How beautiful is this steadfast devotion, if it permeates our whole life and links the years of our priesthood together into one glorious unit! After many sad experiences and disappointments, under the growing weariness of later years, it is difficult to keep up this persevering, uniform devotion, but let us keep before us the Saviour and His Saints! "I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls . . . I wish myself to be anathema from Christ for my brethren!" exclaims St. Paul (2 Cor. XII, 15; Rom. IX, 3). "I would gladly a thousand times sacrifice the light of my eyes," we hear St. Chrysostom say, "if

[6] *Hom. in Evang.,* 30.

I could thereby convert your souls. So much dearer to me is your salvation than my sight. For of what use are the rays of the sun to me if the pain you cause me obscures my sight?" [7] "I confess what is concealed in my heart," observes St. Bonaventure,[8] "so that, even though I knew for certain that I should never enjoy God, I would nevertheless, for His sake, most gladly die for each and every sinful soul, enduring as many deaths as there are sinful souls in the world." *"Sibi semper constans,"* says the Breviary [9] of St. Vincent de Paul. The same should be true of us. Always we should be the same zealous, devoted, hopeful pastors, burning with holy zeal. For human souls are priceless. "The loss of the whole world for one soul would be a small matter." [10] In the realm of Christ it is always a privilege, an inestimable honor, a source of immeasurable happiness, to serve others.

Let us, therefore, rejoice at having received such a sublime calling. Truly, "my inheritance is goodly to me" (Ps. XV, 6). Let us renew all the good resolutions of our happier days; let us kindle in our souls a new enthusiasm for Christ's glorious vineyard, for our blessed service therein, and say: I will be faithful to the end! To serve Christ and His holy realm is my highest ambition, my joy, my happiness! *"Adveniat regnum tuum";*—may our endeavors to realize this petition constitute the contents of our earthly life; then it will have an adequate content and be truly worth living.

[7] *Hom. in Act. Ap.*, 3, 5; Montfauc., IX, 37.
[8] *Stimuli Amor.*, P. II, c. 11.
[9] July 19th.
[10] St. Ambrose, *De Bono Mortis*, c. 5; Migne, 14, 576.

EIGHTH MEDITATION

THE THREE MARITIME MIRACLES OF THE GOSPEL

In the very first chapter of the *Imitation of Christ* we read: "Our greatest study should be to meditate on the life of Jesus." This applies especially to the priest. The life of Christ, as set forth in the holy Gospels, is the best pastoral theology extant. A merely superficial reading, however, like that which we give to a newspaper or an entertaining book, is not enough; we must, as Cassian expresses it,[1] "penetrate to the very marrow of these heavenly utterances." If we undertake this task courageously, we shall be splendidly rewarded. In the Gospels a heavenly world full of brilliant lights is thrown open to us. Every scene there depicted is pregnant with magnificent lessons for us, affords us a beautiful, yea, an entrancing insight into the innermost motives of Jesus, and frequently also into the exterior method of His operation. Certain scenes have a peculiar significance for the priest and his pastoral work. This is especially true of the miracles performed by our Divine Saviour. We will let a group of them pass before our mind in this meditation. They are the so-called maritime miracles that occurred on the Lake of Genesareth, and furnish a

[1] *Coll.*, XIV, 9.

glorious proof of the love and solicitude of Christ for His priests. They are, as it were, specially designed for our benefit,—to enlighten and strengthen us. *"Habes miraculum in elementis, habes documentum in mysteriis."* [2] They show us how Christ strengthens His priests in the difficulties of their vocation, whether these difficulties arise from without or from within, whether they are failures, extraordinarily laborious tasks, actual persecutions, or interior dangers arising from our vocation.

I. *The Wonderful Draught of Fishes (Luke v, 1 ff.)*

The first of these miracles is the wonderful draught of fishes reported by St. Luke in the fifth chapter of his Gospel. It gives us courage, especially when failure or hard tasks happen to fall to our lot.

1. Let us look at this draught of fishes a little more closely. Annually, on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost, the Church calls this event to our attention. It is one of the most important recorded in Sacred Scripture, marking, as it does, the call of St. Peter to the apostolate. The majestic structure of the future Church is prefigured in this miracle. Fishermen are spending the night on the lake, laboring hard to fill their nets; but they catch nothing and at early dawn return empty-handed. Jesus tells them: "Launch out!" Once more the boats go out, carrying this time a precious burden,—the Saviour joyously expectant of the magnificent miracle He is about to work, the Apostles

[2] St. Ambrose, *Expos. in Luc.*, l. IV, n. 69; Migne, 15, 1717.

full of suspense. An irresistible power drives the fishes of the deep into their nets. In countless numbers they fill the boats.

This miraculous draught of fishes typifies the winning of souls: *"Ex hoc iam homines eris capiens."* On that occasion the Saviour's glance extends beyond the limits of place and time. Lake Genesareth becomes the ocean of humanity, in which, like countless fishes, men of all nations crowd into the heavenly nets of His Apostles. How must His heart have throbbed with joy at the sight of the distant future, at the thought of innumerable Apostolic achievements!

Evidently the Lord wished to *encourage* His Apostles. *"Noli timere"* (V, 10), He exhorts them; "Have no fear!" He fully realized the difficulties of the task which He set before them, of converting the world. A gnarled, stiff-necked Judaism confronted them on one side, and a misguided and insolent Paganism on the other. Add thereto the inadequacy of the natural means at their command. They possessed nor power, nor money, nor knowledge. From a human standpoint the undertaking seemed hopeless. Of themselves they cannot catch a single fish, though they are experienced fishermen. With purely human means they can accomplish nothing. But the Master sends them. From His lips they hear the encouraging words: *"Duc in altum, laxate retia."* They set out and behold, the Lord sends a multitude of fishes into their nets, at a time when the fish usually keep themselves in the depths below. How often must not Peter and the other Apostles have thought of this day when they saw afterwards,

how the Saviour, on Pentecost Day and thereafter, in many countries drove the nations into their nets. It was He who enabled the Apostles and their successors to make the abundant hauls typified by this maritime miracle.

2. Our Lord is still driving countless souls into the net of bishops, priests, and missionaries; the glorious miracle of the catch on Lake Genesareth is renewed every day. "Behold I will send many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them" (Jerem. XVI, 16). The same miracle is renewed also in our priestly life. Who of us has not often been astonished at his catches, at the souls which the Lord deigned to guide into his net? He is as good and amiable towards us as He was towards the Apostles. "You see how good the Lord is, who bestows so much upon men," St. Ambrose says at the end of his explanation of this gospel.[3] Yes, the Lord helps us; He will help us also in the future, and work through us. But one thing is necessary:— we must have Him with us in our boat. We can do nothing without Him, but with Him we can do everything, provided that we are obedient to Him. If He tells us: *"Duc in altum,"* then let us set out. Often He orders us out upon the high seas, amid winds and waves, calls us to responsible positions, entrusts us with important business, when, according to human calculations, not much can be accomplished. Nevertheless, we must obey; we must go because He says so—*"in verbo tuo laxabo rete."* And wherever He sends us,

[3] *L.c.*, n. 79, p. 1720.

we may be of good cheer. It will be a splendid catch, even if the time seems unfavorable. How splendid it is to see so many priests setting forth upon the sea of our turbulent age! Filled with holy confidence, without human aid, without much prudence, they set forth and return home laden with heavenly spoils. The Saviour says also to us, *"Duc in altum"*; hence, let us proceed with courage and confidence. Who of us can say that he labors in vain? In the next life you shall see for yourself how the Saviour blessed your efforts.

But even though God bless our work abundantly, we must not become puffed up. When the ship was overloaded Peter exclaimed: *"Exi a me, quia homo peccator sum, Domine."* Such is the humility of an Apostle. We, too, ought to be humble. It does not sound well if we boast of our merits before our ecclesiastical superiors or others. Let us rather say with St. Peter: *"Homo peccator sum."* Whatever good I am or accomplish belongs to the Lord.[4] I may have written brilliant books, I may wear decorations and ecclesiastical and civil honors; but my real title is *"homo peccator."* "O vain presumption, O fruitful humility!" exclaims St. Ambrose.[5] The confession of our sinful-

[4] *"Sicut qui retia iactat in mare, nescit, quos pisces comprehensurus est, sed quos Deus ei transmiserit, illi intrant in retia, sic et doctor, quando divini sermonis retia super populum iactat, nescit, qui sunt accessuri ad Deum, sed quoscunque Deus excitaverit, illi adhaereant doctrinae. Ergo sicut in piscatore labor solus requiritur piscandi, Deus autem transmittit capturam, sic et in doctore nihil requiritur nisi instantia doctrinae, populum autem non corrigit homo, sed Deus."* (*Opus Imperfect. in Matth.*, Hom. 7, 18.)

[5] *Op. cit.*, n. 76, p. 1719.

ness will please the Saviour and bring us His grace and assistance. We, too, shall hear Him say: *"Noli timere, ex hoc iam homines eris capiens."* [6]

II. *The Storm at Sea (Matth. VIII, 23 ff.)*

We shall now pass on to the second maritime miracle, the storm commanded by Jesus.

1. The Gospel says that the storm arose suddenly. The lake, which had been smooth as glass shortly before, was suddenly whipped into fury. Similar things happen in the Church and in the priesthood. As storms sometimes break suddenly from the mountains around Lake Genesareth, so, too, tempests burst upon the bark of Peter, and storms attack the priest from some corner of his parish. Every parish can become a Lake Genesareth for its pastor. A *magnus motus* arises (Matth. VIII, 24), the ship is covered with waves, and with a groan the priestly skipper sinks down and cries: "Lord, help me, I perish!"

It is certain that storms will come. The Saviour has indeed conquered the world and the devil, but He has not destroyed them. They continue to put forth all their efforts against God; it is, as it were, their natural vocation to be His enemies. Our Lord repeatedly foretold persecutions, especially in His parting address (John XV, 18 ff.; XVI, 1 ff.).

[6] *"Sic et tu: Exi a me, Domine, quia homo peccator sum, ut respondeat tibi Dominus: Noli timere."* (St. Ambrose, *l.c.*, n. 79, p. 1720.)

The Gospel twice shows us Jesus in a storm (John VI, 18 ff.; Matth. VIII, 18 ff.), and we know that no Saint, no work of God, no priest who achieves anything worth mentioning in the Kingdom of God, has ever escaped storms.

2. If it is certain that storms will come, it is no less certain, according to the Gospel, that they will prove powerless. The Evangelists portray the situation of the disciples in the boat very graphically. The commotion of the elements was so violent that even these storm-tossed veterans were frightened and called for help. And then, says the Evangelist: *"surgens imperavit ventis et mari, et facta est tranquillitas magna."* As long as He is in the ship, there is no danger. If He does not perish, neither will His associates. So it is with us. Our craft will not go under as long as we have the Saviour with us, *i. e.*, are in the state of sanctifying grace. If He is with us, we have nothing to fear. "We encounter storms," says St. Augustine,[7] "but God comes to our aid." As long as we have Jesus with us, we need fear no enemy, big or little. The winds and the sea obey Him,—the winds, from whatever quarter they may blow, and the roaring sea of human passions. In the midst of all this commotion the priest should stand calmly and trust in the Lord, even though his boat springs a leak and threatens to sink. "Their waters roared and were troubled . . . God is in the midst thereof, it shall not be moved." (Ps. XLV, 4, 6).

[7] Sermo 75 *al. De Divers.*, 22, c. 2; Migne, 38, 475.

3. Of course we must not remain *inactive* while it storms, but exert ourselves to the limit of our strength, as the disciples did on Lake Genesareth. Like them, we must *pray* to the Lord: *"Domine, salva nos."* A time of persecution, be it violent or mild, is always a time for prayer. In prayer the priest unfolds his true strength against the enemy, therein lies the secret of his salvation. The proper course consists not in pusillanimous complaints and excited declamations against one's antagonists and difficulties, but in praying; not in wielding the pen, but in saying the Rosary. Thus the Church has time and again prayed her adversaries and persecutors into submission, and *facta est tranquillitas magna.*

Finally, we should have *confidence. "Quid timidi estis modicae fidei?"* Oh, how often do we not deserve this gentle rebuke from the Saviour, when He sees how faint-hearted we are in persecution! *"Ubi est fides vestra?"* where is your faith?

III. *Christ Walking upon the Water (Matth. XIV, 22 ff.)*

The third maritime miracle is Christ's walking upon the water. It, too, is designed to encourage us amid the dangers of our vocation.

1. The Apostles, caught in a dark, tempestuous night upon the sea, are battling desperately with the waves;—but behold, Jesus is praying for them on the distant mountain, and when the danger is at its height,

He comes to the rescue. This is a picture of the dangers arising from our vocation, owing to the *insufficiency* of our strength, and illustrates the *assistance* which the Lord graciously lends us.

In this nocturnal picture we can recognize the helplessness of the Apostles. They fairly wore out their strength by rowing, but made scarcely any headway (Mark VI, 48). How often do we not meet with such a situation in our pastoral work! How frequently we labor amid the dangers of our calling, amid temptations, worries, and pastoral cares, without making any progress! But take courage! The prayer of Jesus on the mountain is sure to be of benefit to us, and frequently succor reaches us at the right time. How often have difficulties piled up around us like mountains, only to be blown away like feathers? How often conditions arise that are unfavorable, almost desperate, and yet we are led over or under or around them as if by an invisible power! Doubts are solved, painful personal relations smoothed over. At times the entire horizon of our human existence seems darkened by banks of black clouds, yet before we know it they are dispersed! That is due to the nearness of Him who walks upon the sea and says to His disciples: "Be of good heart, it is I, be not afraid!" (Matth. XIV, 27). We could have accomplished nothing with our feeble strength, we should have rowed a long time in vain against wind and waves; but lo! He came and helped us. "Thou rulest the power of the sea, and appeasest the motion of the waves thereof" (Ps. LXXXVIII, 10).

2. There is still more to be learned from this glorious incident. The night scene on the lake contains a new and most peculiar element that is full of instruction for us. Peter calls to the Lord: "Lord, bid me come to Thee," and, quickly resolved, climbs out of the ship, walks upon the water, sinks, is seized by Jesus, and both together, Jesus and Peter, calmly walk upon the waves. Our eye becomes riveted upon this picture of heavenly beauty:—*the Saviour and the first Pope* walking together hand in hand over the watery depths. It is a picture full of comfort for the whole Church, for all centuries of the Church's history, for every pope. It is a guarantee of divine protection to the papacy.

But not only the pope, nay, every Catholic priest can draw personal comfort, instruction, and encouragement from this scene. Everyone who becomes a priest steps out of the ship and attempts to walk upon the water. Like Peter, he becomes *a mariambulus* (St. Augustine).[8] In fact the life of a priest is a daring adventure. To attempt, with weak human nature, to practice such virtues as virginity, to walk unfalteringly in the midst of carnal allurements that are often well-nigh demoniacal, daily to approach the *sanctum sanctorum,* to say Mass in spite of numberless occasions

[8] *Enarr. in Ps.* XXXIX, Sermo n. 9; Migne, 36, 440. Cfr. *ibid.: "Ambula et tu non illis aquis, ubi Petrus aliquid significans ambulavit, sed in aliis; quia hoc saeculum mare est. Habet amaritudinem noxiam, habet fluctus tribulationum, tempestates tentationum; habet homines velut pisces de suo malo gaudentes et tamquam se invicem devorantes; hic ambula, hoc calca . . . Calca mare, ne mergaris. Non ibis, non calcabis, nisi ille iusserit, qui prior in mari ambulavit."*

of sin,—that is truly walking upon the waters! Below us yawns the dismal depth, behind us heave the waves and billows; how imminent on this unusual walk is the danger of sinking! It would indeed be a desperate undertaking to live as a priest should live if the omnipotent hand of God were not held out to keep us above water. But we may rest assured that the same hand that seized Peter is stretched out to save us. At the very entrance to the priesthood this hand took hold of us. When we received the tonsure, when we took our first step upon the sea, the Church recited for us a remarkable prayer, in which she implored Jesus to protect and bless us with His right hand, *manu dexterâ*. Whenever I hear these words, I cannot help thinking of the strong hand that kept Peter above water, and I rejoice that this hand is held out to the young man who wishes to become a priest, just as he is about to venture upon the waters. This omnipotent hand was invoked in our behalf when we entered the priesthood, and oh, how often does it not gleam before us in the dark of night! "Fear not, . . . for I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine! When thou shalt pass through the waters, I will be with thee, and the rivers shall not cover thee; . . . for I am the Lord thy God" (Is. XLIII, 1 ff.).

3. Another consoling thought is suggested by the protection which Christ gave to St. Peter. It cannot be gainsaid that Peter's attempt to climb out of the ship implied precipitation, thoughtlessness, nay, almost presumption. It was exactly like Peter, who was

always "one step ahead of the rest."[9] Yet the Lord in His goodness helped him. How often does God not show this same goodness to us! How many times has our heedlessness, our culpable audacity brought embarrassment or serious difficulty upon us! It is because we are precipitous, hasty, unreasonable in our zeal, that we fall and blunder. And yet Jesus extends a helping hand to us in our need and saves us from drowning. How often does He repair the damage we have done and say kindly and gently: *"Modicae fidei, quare dubitasti?"*

But one thing is indispensably necessary, and that is *prayer*. Not until Peter had prayed: "Lord, help me!" (Matth. XIV, 30), did Jesus save him. But when he had prayed, Jesus *immediately* stretched forth His hand and took hold of him. Unless we pray, we shall surely perish. Oh, how many priests have we seen sinking before our eyes! The abyss swallowed them,—why? Because they had ceased to pray. Döllinger no longer prayed and went under; and many another priest, whom the flood of carnal pleasure has engulfed, perishes because he neglects to pray. We may safely say that a priest who stops praying is sinking fast and is in imminent danger of perishing. The marvelously great and weighty duties of the priestly life cannot be properly fulfilled without constant prayer. Hence we should pray, pray every day, nay, every

[9] *"In omnibus locis ardentissimae fidei invenitur Petrus. Eodem igitur fidei ardore quo semper, nunc quoque; ceteris tacentibus credit se posse facere per voluntatem magistri, quod ille poterat per naturam."* (St. Jerome, *In Matth.*, c. 14, v. 28).

hour: *"Domine, salvum me fac!"* Earnestly send forth the plaintive cry: *"Deus in adiutorium meum intende!"* Every day, every hour you find yourself upon the ocean alone, a yawning abyss below you; fierce, wailing storms attacking you, and the weight of human nature helping to drag you down. *"Deus in adiutorium meum intende!"* That is the cry of distress uttered by weak creatures to the *Deus fortis et immortalis.* And when the hand of the Saviour seizes us (Is. XLI, 13), let us grasp it firmly and never let go!

Let us carry home with us this resolution: I will walk hand in hand with my Saviour especially in days of temptation and nights of storm. Keeping close to Him, I will complete my journey upon the sea of life, until I reach the shore of eternity with Him. "The Lord did these things marvelously [Peter upon the lake]; regard them with the eyes of faith, and act in like manner; though the winds blow, and waves rage, and human frailty causes you to doubt your salvation, you can cry out: Lord, I perish! He who commanded you to walk will not let you perish." [10]

[10] St. Augustine, *l. c.*

NINTH MEDITATION

THE PRIEST'S VIA DOLOROSA

ALL the mysteries of Christ's life, His titles, His offices, His virtues, are brought out in their highest perfection in His dolorous Passion. The Passion of Christ is the marrow of all meditations for the priest. Out of its immeasureable depths he can draw many profound truths. The sacerdotal life with its manifold sufferings in many respects resembles the life of the suffering Redeemer, and every priest's career is more or less an image of Christ's Passion. If it can be truly said, *"Sacerdos est alter Christus,"* then the life of the priest must also reflect His suffering, else something essential would be wanting. Hence meditation on the Passion has a special charm and a secret attraction for every good priest. "It is this, I say, which lures our devotion more flatteringly, exacts it more justly, and affects it more vehemently." [1]

The Church has introduced a special devotion to the Passion of Our Lord, which imparts rich graces. I mean the *Via Crucis.* Great Saints like Leonard of Port Maurice have enthusiastically recommended the Way of the Cross to the faithful, and particularly to

[1] St. Bernard, *In Cantic.,* Serm., 20, 2.

penitents. But not only the faithful laity and penitents, but we priests, too, can profit by this devotion. Who needs the numerous indulgences attached to this exercise more than the priest? And may we not intwine with the fourteen Stations of the Cross the mysteries of our own sacerdotal *via dolorosa,* and thereby open for ourselves a fountain of special strength and consolation? In many respects the Stations of the Cross are a mirror of the priest's path of suffering.

A Few of the Principal Stations

The *first station* is entitled: "Jesus is Condemned to Death." What contrasts does this picture put before us! What depths does it disclose to our eyes! The overwhelming Majesty of God stands accused before a tiny creature. Incarnate Holiness is judged by a miserable sinner. To what incredible depths of debasement does the Son of God descend! From the right hand of the Father He descends to the praetorium of the Roman governor, stands before an earthly tribunal, and accepts a shocking sentence, which the Saints could never hear without tears. *Condemned to Death!* Who can comprehend this mystery? God comes down to His creatures, and His creatures bind Him, gag Him, spit upon Him, scourge Him, and condemn Him to death.

This frightful sentence of the praetorium has found an equally frightful echo throughout the whole world, and it is repeated every day, even at the present time. Even now Christ, in His Church, is daily sentenced

to death in thousands of places. And we priests, by receiving sacred orders, have espoused a cause upon which the world has long ago rendered its verdict. We can hear the sentence of death pronounced upon us and the cause we represent everywhere, we can read it in hundreds of newspapers and books. How often does Pilate, who "washes his hands," recur in Church history down to this day! The universal cry: *"Tolle, crucifige!"* (John XIX, 15) resounds about us constantly. The mere fact that we are despised by the majority of men, for no other reason than that we wear the priestly garb, indicates that we must share the reproach which Christ met in this world (Hebr. XIII, 13). This is a great grief, but it is also a profound consolation. "They went forth from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus," was written of the Apostles (Acts V, 41). We, too, may rejoice in this blessed proof that we belong to Christ. In considering the first station, we may cheerfully take our stand beside our Saviour, knowing that the sentence of the unjust judge is meant also for us.

But there is a more personal side to this matter. It oftens happens to the very best of priests that their undertakings, motives, and character are prejudged without a hearing, and not only by heathen and unbelievers, but by their own parishioners and their fellow-priests. Nearly every one of our great Saints has had this experience, and many have stood weeping at this first Station of the Cross, reflecting upon the

bitter sentence that had been passed upon them. What an example the Saviour gives us! He accepts His condemnation in silence. In view of this example the Saints bore the bitterest censures silently. In a priest this is an impressive act of heroism, but it is also very difficult. In the school of the Way of the Cross one can learn this sublime, godlike silence. "There," as St. Ambrose says,[2] "the patience to bear moral injury with equanimity is infused into the human heart. He who needs no defense does well to remain silent . . . That cause is better which is not defended and yet proven; that righteousness is fuller which is not supported by words, but rests upon truth."

Second Station: "Jesus is Made to Bear His Cross." In Fürich's famous picture of this scene it is touching to behold the courage and enthusiasm with which Jesus accepts His Cross. *"Proposito sibi gaudio, sustinuit crucem, confusione contempta.* Having joy proposed to Him, He endured the Cross, despising the shame," says the Apostle (Hebr. XII, 2). What a choice! And what a lesson! Eternal Wisdom chooses the Cross. Christ, who cannot be deceived, who cannot choose wrongly,—embraces the Cross! Had there been anything better or more salutary for the welfare of mankind, surely He would have chosen it.[3] How many have followed His example and embraced the Cross! The priest, too, by his vocation is directed to the Cross. At your ordi-

[2] *Expos. in Luc.*, X, n. 97; Migne, 15, 1921.
[3] *Imit. of Christ*, II, 12, 15.

nation the bishop solemnly laid the stole upon your breast in the form of a cross. The stole was fastened about you thus in order to impress upon you the lesson that you must carry the Cross of Christ.[4] Is not this a symbolic prophecy of the future, is it not, so to speak, a consecration of the sacerdotal life to the *via crucis?* In a certain sense it may be said also of us priests: *"proposito gaudio sustinuit crucem."* Many of the legitimate joys of life were within our reach if we had preferred a secular vocation; but we selected the cross,—the heavy cross of self-denial, mortification, and renunciation; the cross of a virginal life with its conflicts and sacrifices, and the many little crosses involved in a pastor's duties. The priest is born to be a cross-bearer. "I will show him how great things he must suffer for the sake of my name" (Acts IX, 16). Let us always embrace the Cross courageously like our Divine Saviour! "If you carry your cross reluctantly," says St. Teresa, "it is a burden; if you embrace it willingly, it ceases to be a burden." How nobly the Divine Cross-bearer stands before us at the second station! If your life becomes a burden to you, go to the second station, where Jesus takes His Cross upon Himself. Consider His example long and earnestly, and you will find courage to take up your cross with zest and devotion.

Third Station: "The Saviour," tired and weak, "Falls Beneath the Cross." A touching scene,—so touching that it is presented to us three times in suc-

[4] *Cat. Rom.*, P. II, cap. VII, qu. 24.

cession. The priest, too, at times sinks down under the weight of the cross. Ah, how many priests upon the five continents of the earth might be seen each day breaking down under the cross, and saying with a groan: "I can go no farther!" "We were pressed out of measure above our strength," says St. Paul, "so that we were weary even of life" (2 Cor. I, 8). Carrying the cross tires us quickly and soon exhausts our strength. Many a priest weakens under the oppressive experiences of his pastoral work, under those everlastingly recurring temptations, in this never-ending conflict. He wishes to cast aside his cross, asks for another appointment, goes there and finds—*another cross!* "If you cast aside one cross, you will undoubtedly find another, and perhaps a heavier one." [5] The Saviour, full of patience and resignation, rises after each fall and again takes up His Cross. Let us follow His example and go forward in the name of God.

Fourth Station: "Jesus Meets His Mother." Mary, who for so many years had trodden the same path with her Divine Son, wished to join Him also on His last journey. What a meeting between the *Vir Dolorum* and the *Mater Dolorosa!* Two oceans of sorrow flow into one. The Passion of our Lord and the compassion of His holy Mother are merged in the mysterious fourth station. Let us glance again at the priest proceeding upon *his* painful way of the cross. He is permitted to meet the sorrowful Mother of God,

[5] *Imit. of Christ*, II, 12, 5.

who so well understands our afflictions, as often as he wills. Let him practice that blessed devotion to the *Mater Dolorosa* which theologians regard as a mark of election. Let him pour his grief into the ocean of Mary's grief. The priest can always be certain of sympathy and help from the virginal Mother of Sorrows.

Fifth Station: "Simon of Cyrene Helps Jesus Carry His Cross." Here we see two cross-bearers: Jesus and Simon; the one willing, the other unwilling. *"Angariaverunt,"* says the Gospel (Matth. XXVII, 32). Whom do we resemble, Jesus or Simon? There can scarcely be any question. Do we not in many things bear our cross unwillingly, like the Cyrenean? The cross is often laid upon us by force; we would not assume it of our own accord. But how fortunate for Simon that Jesus met him on his way. The cross meant for him predestination to eternal happiness. Happy he upon whose back the cross finds a willing place, and who learns to love it! "My beloved sickness," a saintly priest called the epilepsy that tortured him for many years. "You who have been tried," says St. Bernard, "know that our cross was truly laid upon us . . . and that our bitterness is, as it were, most sweet." [6] And again: "The cross may be truly loved and even has its delights." [7] To become a voluntary cross-bearer would be the best thing that could happen to us. "When you have arrived at the stage

[6] *In Dedicat. Eccles.,* Sermo 1, 5.
[7] *In Festo S. Andreae,* Sermo 1, 2.

where tribulation is sweet to you, and you relish it for Christ's sake, then think that all is well with you, because you have found a paradise on earth." [8]

Sixth and Eighth Stations: "Veronica and the Weeping Women." Did you ever give a thought to the part taken by women in the Passion of Our Lord? Their conduct is invariably honorable and worthy of praise. The men torture Jesus: the governor, the king, the highpriest, the sanhedrin, the soldiers; one man betrays Him, another denies Him; His Apostles flee in the hour of danger. We find only one man beneath the Cross—St. John. How different the women! "All others having deserted the Lord, the women persevered in their ministrations." [9] Wherever women appear in the course of the Passion, they exhibit love and compassion. Before all, the Blessed Mother herself; then the other holy women, who, filled with noble courage, persevere at the foot of the Cross throughout those three frightful hours; also the wife of Pilate, who intercedes for Jesus; finally, Veronica and the weeping women. Throughout the Passion woman appears in a halo of noble sentiment and virtue. Who will deny that women are true to this type to-day? Where does the Saviour, as represented by His Church and the priesthood, find more enemies, antagonists, tormentors,—among men or among women? Where do we find more unbelievers and immoral monsters,—among men or among women? And when attacks are made upon the priesthood in virulent newspaper

[8] *Imit. of Christ,* II, 12, 11.
[9] St. Jerome.

articles, in assemblies, or elsewhere, are not the men always in the van, whilst the women silently and sometimes loudly side with the priest, or lend him their sympathy and pray for him when he is stoned or crucified? Many of us know it from experience. How many Veronicas can be found to-day who compassionately offer the priest of Christ a towel in his sufferings? The priesthood and Christian womanhood, are they not dependent upon each other? How zealous must the priest be to preserve the piety of woman, especially in our day, when the enemy is directing his attacks also upon the faith of womanhood! How important are the societies of Christian women, of mothers in particular, which have sprung up everywhere! Upon His way of the cross Jesus spoke to none but women; His last, short, stirring sermon was addressed to mothers and their children.

Tenth Station: "Jesus is Stripped of His Garments." This outrage still continues. The enemies of the Lord have robbed Him by taking away the temporal possessions of His Church. And the stripping of garments took place especially in Rome, where Christ stands naked, despoiled of His temporal power, in His representative, the Pope. How many governments there are, both big and little, to whom all church property is legitimate prey! Many a priest could tell tales of how Christ was stripped of His garments within his personal experience. Not a few priests have deserved well for their courage in opposing the avarice of Christ's enemies.

Eleventh Station: "Jesus is Nailed to the Cross." How unutterably painful was this operation, and how Christ must have suffered, hanging there for three long hours! In the 22nd Psalm we have the doleful, inspired music to this divine tragedy, by which we are enabled to feel deeply what happened from the sixth to the ninth hour. But let us see if we do not find in our own life a quivering echo of Mount Calvary. St. Paul says (Gal. II, 19): "With Christ I am nailed to the Cross;" and: "They who are Christ's have crucified their flesh" (Gal. V, 24). If, therefore, every Christian is crucified in a certain sense, then it can be said with even greater propriety of the priest, that he hangs upon the Cross with Christ. He was nailed fast by Holy Orders: sub-deaconship, deaconship, and the priesthood are as three nails that hold him down. But he was nailed voluntarily; he freely sacrificed his liberty and crucified his body with its lusts. One may also say to him (John XXI, 18): When thou wast younger,—*i. e.,* a layman,—thou didst walk where thou wouldst; *"cum autem senueris,"*—when thou becamest a priest, thou wert girt. He hears about him enticing or deriding voices calling: "Come down from the cross of constant enslavement to duty, lay down this cross of severity and mortification, regularity in prayer and exercises; take it easy!" Who has never heard this tempting call? What priest is deaf to the multitude of voices that daily accost him in effeminate literature, the arts, the many things he sees and hears, voices that cry insidiously: "Thou fool, come down from the cross and enjoy life!" But the true priest

remains unaffected by these siren-songs and says with Christ: "I have a baptism, wherewith I am to be baptized; and how I am straightened until it be accomplished" (Luke XII, 50)! He clings to his painful but blessed cross. Grace helps and comforts him, faith supports him, and he is firmly convinced that, as St. Ignatius Loyola says, all the honey which can be gathered from the flowers of this world has no such sweetness as the gall and vinegar of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Twelfth Station: "Jesus Dies on the Cross." The priest also dies on his cross. *"Mortuus est* [*Christus*] *pro te in cruce, ut et tu mori affectes in cruce."* [10] The trials of the priest do not end till he takes his last breath. Often the last days and hours of his life bear a striking resemblance to the end of his Divine Master. Many an inward cry of anguish escapes from his soul as his eyes grow dim, and he begins to understand the mystery of divine justice and human sinfulness. Yet his soul nestles fondly at the heart of God. "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke XXIII, 46), was the beautiful evening prayer of Christ's life; may it also be ours! Every day the Church places this prayer upon our lips in Compline, thereby teaching us to associate the thought of our night's rest with that of our life's close: *"Noctem quietam et finem perfectem!" "In manus tuas,"* is our daily evening prayer; may it be our last prayer upon the *via dolorosa* of this life!

[10] *Imit. Chr.*, II, 12, 2.

Thirteenth Station: "Jesus is Taken from the Cross and Placed in the Arms of His Mother." Her dead Saviour,—what a spectacle, what a subject for meditation! The priest closely resembles Him when he is dead. Many a priest lies in his coffin like a victorious hero. Many a deceased priest, in his quiet, peaceful repose, looks as though he had been taken down from the cross to rest. *"Requiescunt a laboribus suis"* (Apoc. XIV, 13). That is the impression I received at the death-bed of our bishop.[11] Shortly before I had seen him in his agony, in the last stages of a long, laborious life, as if upon a cross;—but when I saw his corpse soon after, he looked like one taken down from his episcopal cross and calmly resting.

Fourteenth Station. From the Cross Jesus goes to the grave. That is also the way of the priest. By lying in the grave, the Saviour, our Chief Priest, has sanctified this abode. Let us take a look at His funeral. The Almighty God is carried to His grave by a few of His creatures. What a touching funeral cortège! The mourners at this most illustrious of all burials were: the Mother of God and a few pious souls whom Jesus had converted. How precious the tears

[11] The author refers to the Rt. Rev. Carl Joseph von Hefele, the famous historian of the church councils, who died June 5, 1893, after having presided over the Diocese of Rottenburg for over twenty-three years. Before his consecration he had been connected for thirty-three years with the University of Tübingen as professor. He achieved wide renown through his great History of the Church Councils. (See the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII).

shed at this interment! May our obsequies be attended by a large number of souls whom we ushered into Heaven! The burial of a good priest is a spectacle for angels and men. From his grave rises an odor of peace. Spring bedecks the mound with flowers, as it did the tomb of Christ, whilst around it hover the gratitude and love of the parishioners. It is, therefore, not the breath of death, but the breath of life that comes from the tomb of a good priest. We know that, like the Saviour's sepulchre, a pastor's grave is only a temporal resting place, where he slumbers until the dawn of the great Easter morn.

But we must not go beyond the terminus of the *via dolorosa,* which ends with burial. We have convinced ourselves, I trust, that with our Lord's Way of the Cross are closely interwoven our own life and suffering, our own battles and hopes, and that the holy practice of making the Stations of the Cross is a stimulating and instructive devotion for all the stages of our priestly life. We should be grateful to our Lord for the Way of the Cross and often make it. When our time is limited, we can make the Stations in a few minutes and still gain many graces and indulgences; a moment's reflection upon our Lord's Passion at each station is all that is required. "I have called these things [the Passion of Christ] wisdom; therein I place my progress in righteousness, fullness of knowledge, riches of salvation, abundance of merit. At times I draw from it salutary potions of bitterness, and again the sweet unction of solace. It lifts me up in adversity, it keeps

me humble in prosperity, and amidst the joys and sorrows of this life they offer him who proceeds by the royal road a safe leadership in both, by repelling impending evils on all sides." [12]

[12] St. Bernard, *In Cantic.*, Sermo 43, 4.

TENTH MEDITATION

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

In the life of Christ, Golgotha is followed by Easter morning and the glory of the Resurrection. If we wish to understand what is essential in the Life of Christ, let us give our particular attention to its glorious ending. His Divinity, which was shrouded by the dark clouds of His Passion, now appears in all its splendor and lends to His figure a ravishing majesty and glory. It manifests itself in miracles and graces poured out upon the souls of men. We behold Him in His humanity,—the Man of Sorrows, who had neither beauty nor comeliness (Is. LIII, 2),—now gloriously transfigured. For forty days we see Him active in behalf of the Kingdom of God, *"loquens de regno"* (Acts I, 3). At length the hour of the Ascension arrives.

The mystery of the Ascension has two aspects: the one earthly, the other heavenly. Let us consider both.

I. *Earthly Aspect of the Ascension*

1. Let us first consider what occurs on earth. We see the Saviour surrounded by His disciples and the holy women on Mount Olivet. As usual, He treats

them in the most affable manner, gives them His final instructions, a last parting look full of tenderness and love, and, finally, His solemn benediction. Then He rises from the ground and slowly ascends heavenward, leaving behind Him men who have their hands full of power and their hearts full of courage and joy. What was going on in the Heart of Jesus as He ascended into Heaven? It was filled with sentiments of triumph and jubilation. Once more He looks towards Golgotha, the scene of His suffering. How brief was His Passion, how short His life on earth! He looks toward Bethlehem, where He was born, towards Nazareth, where He grew up. He sees all the roads of the Holy Land, upon which He plodded so wearily, the Lake of Genesareth glimmering yonder. And now the earth lies far below Him, with all its cares, worries, and sins, its emperors and kings, its politics and its commerce. His transfigured form, radiant with heavenly glory, rises higher and higher, "like the eagle that has left earthly filth, soaring aloft, enjoys the wholesomeness of purer air." [1] How quickly His years on earth had passed! And yet how much, how incalculably much was achieved in that short space! How much did the Saviour gain for Himself and for us! How happy and light of heart He must have felt!

2. Now let us think of the moment when we shall depart from this earth. There is something solemn about the death of a priest. There may also be a

[1] St. Maximus, *Brev.* 1, 4. Fer. 3 *infra Octav. Ascens. Christi.*

last blessing, perhaps some parting words,—and then the soul hurries off and leaves the earth far behind. How easy for a good priest is the departure from this earth, with its bustle and perversion, its turmoil and haggling, and its everlasting unrest! What a glorious moment when the soul darts upward to her goal, into the stillness of eternity! *"Surge, propera, amica"* (Cantic. II, 10). How buoyantly it sweeps on, released from the shackles of the body, the measure, number, and weight of earthly things!

II. *Heavenly Aspect of the Ascension*

1. Now consider the heavenly aspect of Christ's Ascension. What commotion among the angelic hosts when He arrives in Heaven! The angels all come to meet and escort Him. What a triumph when the Lord arrives at the celestial city with His train of angelic and human attendants! Who can describe this lifting up of the eternal gates (Ps. XXIII)? What a storm of jubilation sweeps through the golden streets of the city of God![2] What a solemn moment

[2] *"Ecce omnes spirituum ordines . . . occurrerunt eidem, unus ex eis non remansit, qui non veniret obviam Domino suo et . . . deducebant eum cum hymnis et canticis ineffabilibus. Quis enim posset cantus et iubilos, qui ab ipsis fiebant, explicare? Advenerunt ergo principes coniuncti psallentes et dicebant: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia . . . Benedictus es, Domine, qui sedes super Cherubim et intueris abyssos, alleluia"* etc. (According to the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, c. 98 . . . *Inter Opera S. Bonaventurae*).—*"Iste est, quem angelicae potestates videntes ad patrem ascendere . . . imperant ceteris angelis et ab eis audiunt: Levate portas principales vestras et elevamini portae aeternales et introibit rex gloriae. Quis est iste rex gloriae?", etc.* (St. Jerome, *In Is.*, c. 63, v. 1.)

when, for the first time, the created human nature of Christ takes its place upon the throne of the Divinity! Holy Scripture tells it all in one short sentence. But under the cloak of these words is concealed the incomparable splendor of the glorified Saviour: *"Sedet a dextris Dei"* (Mark XVI, 19). This sitting at the right hand of God the Father implies a life of sublime power and majesty, of repose and peace, yet of incredible activity, full of victories and successes. On earth He had the wretched stall, the narrow hut at Nazareth for His dwelling; here it is the measureless mead (Chaucer) of Heaven.

2. In the glorification of Christ we see typified our own. "The Ascension of Christ is our own going hence, and whither the glory of the head proceeded, thither is called also the hope of the body." [3] If we have followed Christ on earth, we shall also share His Resurrection. That is "a faithful saying," says the Apostle (2 Tim. II, 11 f.); "for if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him, if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." God guarantees this pledge with all the authority of His written word. The certificate of ordination, which we have in our possession, is our assurance that we shall reign eternally with God, provided we have done our duty faithfully.

Let us meditate for a moment on this great and heavenly reward.

(a) A day will come when we shall be *free from all evil,*—that day on which, as Holy Scripture so ten-

[3] *S. Leo M., De Ascens.,* Sermo 1, 4.

derly assures us (Apoc. XXI, 4), "God shall wipe all tears from our eyes." The priest's tears flow, as did the tears of the Redeemer, on behalf of human souls. His weeping is not so much outward as inward. He weeps for all the misery on earth, our own and that of others, bodily and spiritual. Oh, how delightful it will be when "the God of all consolation" (2 Cor. I, 3) shall wipe the tears from his eyes! *"Et mors ultra non erit, neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra,"* for the former things are passed away (Apoc. XXI, 4). People will indeed continue to lament and wail here below, the earth will still whirl through space, but you will be far beyond the stream of transitory things, where no grief can touch you.

(b) Instead, you shall be flooded by a stream of *joy* and *bliss:* a glory that shall make your *body* shine like the sun, and lend it spirit-like attributes, such as the power to pass through space with ease. All the fountains of pleasure will be uncovered and refresh the body and its senses.

Even greater will be the happiness of the *soul.* What a depth of *understanding* and knowledge will be opened before it when the light of glory inundates and carries it away to the beatific vision of God, where we see Him no longer as through a glass darkly, but *"facie ad faciem sicut est"* (1 Cor. XIII, 12; 1 John III, 2). What bliss to behold in God the unveiling of one's whole career, to see the divine plan in which we were involved from all eternity, more wonderful than we ever suspected! What happiness to look upon the

miracles of omnipotence, wisdom and love, which by degrees guided our terrestrial life to the height of Heaven! The *will* shall glory in the love of God, in the perfect, inalienable possession of the Supreme Good! And besides these essential, there are *accidental* joys: the aureole of virginity, the special distinction of the priest who loved and faithfully administered the Blessed Sacrament on earth; the marvelous splendor of the *"character indelebilis,"* which assures the glorified priest of the love and admiration of the inhabitants of Heaven. There will be no joy beyond his reach, no desire will be unfulfilled, his soul will sail ever farther and farther into the ocean of bliss, yet reach no end. At every moment his happiness will seem to him to have reached the utmost limit of possibility, yet he is continuously flooded by ever mightier waves of bliss. "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure" (Ps. XXXV, 9).

(c) And this bliss will endure *for ever*. In the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity, in the festive jubilation of the heavenly choirs, in intimate association with millions of celestial citizens, all of whom are kings (*"ibi quot cives tot reges"*), in all these delights a thousand years will seem like a single hour, and other blissful millenniums will succeed this, and so on, aeons upon aeons, *per omnia saecula saeculorum*. *"Ecce quod erit in fine sine fine!"* rapturously exclaims St. Augustine at the conclusion of his book *De Civitate Dei*.

That is the goal which we contemplated from afar in our first meditation *de fine;* now we see it, as it were, nearby; we seem to hear the eternal alleluia that awaits the good priest who has been faithful to the end. This is the deeper meaning of the word of Our Divine Saviour which we so frequently read in the Breviary: *"Ubi sum ego, illic minister meus erit"* (John XII, 26), and: *"Gaudebit cor vestrum, et gaudium vestrum nemo tollet a vobis"* (John XVI, 22).

3. Hence let us often stand *"aspicientes in caelum,"* like the *"viri Galilaei"* (Acts I, 11). What an encouragement it is amid the tribulations of a priest's daily life to think of Heaven! If a ray of the light of glory beams on our toil, it is easy to bear all vexations. Compared with the "weight" of glory (*"pondus gloriae"*) awaiting us in Heaven, our present tribulations, including the specifically sacerdotal crosses, are mere trifles (*"momentaneum et leve"; 2* Cor. IV, 17). *"Existimo,"* says the Apostle (Rom. VIII, 18), *"quod non sunt condignae,"*—they are not to be compared with the *"futura gloria, quae revelabitur in nobis."*

Hence, as long as we cannot actually ascend to Heaven, let us do so at least in spirit. "Let us follow in our heart whither we believe Him to have ascended in body." [4] This spiritual ascension, this soaring of the soul above earthly things, is part of our calling. In our daily meditation every morning let us ascend to the regions of pure truth, where the soul floats blithely and bursts into hymns of exultation.

[4] St. Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Evangel., 29.*

At night, before going to bed, let us take another flight in fervent prayer. Let us endeavor to raise our soul above the vulgarities that surround us on all sides, above all the nasty wrangling on earth, above the fury of passion! The priest's soul should soar above all this lowliness as the bird soars above the surface of the earth. Let us raise our soul also above the tumult of the flesh that rages within us. Though the evil passions bluster and howl, the soul will glide serenely upward. And let our ascension, finally, be an *ascensio* above all bodily weakness and pain. We are admonished by the Church *"ut mente in caelestibus habitemus,"* [5] pondering our heavenly reward,—a practical motive which distinctly accords with our nature.

What else do these glorious words mean which the Church makes us repeat every day: *"Sursum corda"?* How good of our Mother to bid us rise each morning, as on angels' wings, above the narrow horizon of everyday life. *"Sursum corda"* is a message of liberation and comfort, a heavenly strain befitting the place where it is intoned, namely the holy mountain of Thabor, from where each day we look out beyond time and space, sheltered securely within the *lucida nubes* and drawn into the transfigured glory of our Lord. This *sursum corda* of the morning should permeate the labors and exertions of the entire day and thus become the motto of our sacerdotal life. Thus we shall ever soar above the groveling earth, until one day it shall be said: "Behold, I come quickly,

[5] Collect for the Feast of the Ascension.

and my reward is with me" (Apoc. XXII, 12). "Man of God, what hast thou in common with cast-off earthly things,—thou art destined for Heaven and wilt soon be clothed with the garb of glory?" [6] *"Sic veniet, quemadmodum vidistis euntem in caelum"* (Acts I, 11). He will return with the same power and majesty for the great day of His triumph, which will also be our triumph, as His Heaven will be our Heaven! *Fiat!*

[6] St. Bernard, *Ep. 226 ad Luger Abbat.*

CONFESSION AND THE PRIEST'S DAILY ORDER OF LIFE

I. First of all let me say a few words about the confession which we make at the retreat. St. Bernard writes: "If you desire interior fitness, love confession; . . . confession is a splendid ornament of the soul; it purifies the sinner and makes the just cleaner. Confession is necessary to the sinner, and it befits the just man." [1] The purpose of a retreat is to give to the soul a new *decor* and *candor,* and one of the principal means to this end is a good confession. Let us, therefore, recall a few points deserving of special attention as we are about to receive the Sacrament of Penance, which we ourselves so often recommend to the people. *"Medice, cura teipsum"* we should humbly say to ourselves (Luke IV, 23).

1. The confession which we make at retreat should be a general confession, extending over one or more years. It is necessary to institute a house-cleansing every now and then. Let it be as thorough as possible. If our regular, ordinary confessions were at any time defective, now is the chance to correct the defect.

[1] *Ep. 113 ad Sophiam Virg.*

(a) In *examining our conscience* we should pay special attention to possible *gravia,* their number and circumstances. The Tridentine Council[2] says that some things which are merely *levia* for laymen, may be *gravia* for clerics, on account of their position and the danger of scandal. We should further examine whether any habitual, deliberate venial sins of consequence have crept into our lives (*e. g.,* neglect of prayer, uncharitableness in sentiment and speech, a wrong use of time, etc.). We should examine ourselves as to the special duties of our state, how we have dispensed the heavenly treasures of the sanctuary,[3] how we have handled the Blessed Sacrament at various functions. Outwardly: during Holy Mass, when distributng Holy Communion, at Benediction, do I show due respect to my Lord and Saviour in this Sacrament? Inwardly: have I true reverence, love, and devotion? What is wrong with my way of saying Mass? Do I lack fervor in preaching? If so, what is the reason? As to my catechetical instructions: do I find visiting the school a burden? Why? Do I prepare myself properly? How do I attend to the sick? In supervising the morals of my parish, do I exercise that constant watchfulness to which a pastor is obliged? Do I tolerate improprieties? What have I done to promote the frequent reception of the Sacraments? Have I taken an active interest in Catholic societies, which are so important at the

[2] Sess. XXII, c. 1, *de Ref.*

[3] *"De caelestibus conditis, de horreis divinis."* (St. Peter Chrysologus, Sermo 26; Migne, 52, 272.)

present time? How do I manage the church funds entrusted to me? Do I provide for the poor? What use do I make of that portion of my income that is not strictly necessary for my support? These are questions which a priest should not lose sight of. *"Non peccata Caroli tantum, sed peccata Caesaris."*

But we must probe still deeper, we must go to the root of the evil and examine ourselves as to the real *cause* of our sins. From what passion do they rise? And since there is one among our passions that dominates all others, we should ask ourselves: Which is my *passio dominans?* The ruling passion gives a certain tone, a kind of frightful uniformity to one's whole life. Much in the career of a priest is incomprehensible unless it be explained by the *passio dominans.* How, for example, could it be explained that a *miser sacerdos* abandons himself to *luxuria,* although he must admit that some day his sin will leak out and that, consequently, his reputation, his honor, his living are at stake? It cannot be explained except by the *passio dominans,* which makes all things subservient to its own gratification. Or how could anyone explain it when a priest, who is secretly or publicly given to drink, drifts with open eyes into the ruination of his good name and health, except by attributing it to *gula,* which, like a *daemon blandus,*[4] si-

[4] St. Peter Chrysologus: *"Hanc [ebrietatem] qui habet, se non habet; hanc qui habet, homo non est; hanc qui habet, non peccatum facit, sed est ipse peccatum. Ebrietas est daemon blandus, venenum dulce, rabies voluntaria, invitatus hostis, illecebra honestatis et pudoris iniuria; hanc nullus noverit Christianus,*

lences every other consideration? Or how explain it when a priest lets everything go to seed in his parish, preaches poorly, heeds not the grumbling of his parishioners or the dissatisfaction of his superiors,—unless it be that his *passio dominans, sloth,* stifles his sense of duty and honor? Almost every man, the priest included, has a ruling passion. Thank God that it cannot completely unfold its wings in every soul. Grace, self-control, devout prayer, and frequent use of the means of protection afforded by our holy faith prevent its full development. But it may be looked on as a fortress, in which is ensconced a *"hostis armatus"* (Luke XI, 21), who imperils the life of grace and the welfare of the soul. It is of supreme importance to make a breach into this fortress, to break the power of this tyrant over our interior life, in order that we may be free. But before one can subdue one's dominant passion, one must learn to know it. There are some who never realize what is wrong with them, and which vice is the main root of their sins. For the priest confession at retreat affords a splendid opportunity to probe his conscience. If we note what sins we accuse ourselves most of during the year, what is the usual trend of our thoughts, what most readily makes us glad or sad, we shall soon discover our ruling passion. When found, it should be frankly avowed before God and His representative in the tribunal of penance.

ne auditu quidem sacerdos attingat, ne qui est forma virtutum, vitiorum inde fiat et inveniatur exemplum." (*Sermo* 26; Migne 52, 273.)

(b) In hearing confessions nothing edifies us more than the unfeigned *candor* with which many of the laity confess their sins and reveal the nakedness of their soul. Nothing indeed accords so well with the purpose of confession, nothing is so adapted to draw down God's mercy upon a contrite heart, as a candid, humble self-accusation, which conceals nothing, extenuates nothing, and misrepresents nothing. *"Debet namque confessio simplex esse et nullo duplicitatis errore fuscata,"* says St. Lawrence Justiniani.[5] This simplicity and manly candor should characterize the confession of the priest. He sees in the confessor solely the representative of Christ;[6] it is to God, the omniscient Searcher of hearts,[7] that he reveals his sins. "Let him manifest his sins, just as they were,—distinctly, candidly, without excuse, not in a general way, but exactly as they were committed," the same Saint demands. Frankness is so salutary precisely because it implies humiliation. It is advisable to introduce into every confession something that is especially humiliating to our pride. There is a special blessing on this practice. Humble souls, says St. Alphonsus, are a target for divine grace. Usually it is only the first step to such little humiliations that requires heroic effort; afterwards one makes the sacrifice gladly. In view of the insincerity which is so prevalent in the outward dealings of men, and which befouls and poisons all social inter-

[5] *De Discipl. et Perfect. Monast. Conversat.*, c. 19.

[6] *"Confessario tamquam Christo assistit"*; S. Laurent. Just., *l.c.*

[7] *"Scrutator cordium, cognitor secretorum"*; *Pontific. De Ordinat. Diacon.*

course, we feel that the confessional should be a place where no disguise is worn, but the wounds of the soul are exhibited in their ugly nakedness. "See, I do not cover my wounds; you are a physician, I am sick; you are merciful, I am miserable." [8] But who gives us this spirit of unaffected truthfulness, who gives us the necessary courage to lay bare our souls before the confessor? It is the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of truth. Hence the importance of invoking Him before we approach the sacred tribunal.

(c) The essential requisite of Penance, as we know, is *contrition.* How careful we are, when hearing confessions, or preparing others for confession, to stress the importance of contrition. It may easily happen that those who confess frequently and have only venial sins, are the very ones who frustrate the Sacrament of Penance by their lack of contrition. The great truths concerning sin, death, hell, and the Cross, which are pondered during every retreat, are calculated to open the interior fountains of contrition and cause them to flow abundantly. A *perfect* supernatural contrition is most desirable. It is a great grace to be able to elicit it.[9] We should aim at habitual contrition, a state of compunction. Throughout the Mass and in the Breviary we are constantly reminded that we are sinners who stand in need of forgiveness. If we entertain this feeling habitually, a glance at the crucifix, the thought

[8] St. Augustine, *Confess.,* X, 28.

[9] *"Unum de perfectis donis descendentibus a patre luminum";* Gregor. M., *Explan. Ps. VIII poenitent.*

of hell or Heaven, will quickly enkindle contrition in our heart.

(d) Finally, there is the *firm purpose of amendment.* If half-heartedness and indecision weigh like a curse upon the spiritual life of a Christian or a cleric, it will naturally also show itself in his good resolutions. There is something lame and halting about them, they lack vigor and determination. Say often: *"Dixi, nunc coepi"* (Ps. LXXVI, 11), I will do better! It easily happens that we direct our *proposita* too little to the most important point, namely, our ruling passion. How profitable would it be for us to make a whole-hearted resolution on this point,—to take the bull by the horns, as it were! Mere velleities, sleepy efforts to get back on our feet, do not bring us very far in the spiritual life. If there is anything in this world that requires energy, it is the constant swimming against the stream which is demanded by our holy religion. It is no easy matter to employ the means that are necessary to root out our faults. In this even we priests are children of our times, suffering from the universal lukewarmness and effeminacy. Let us think of St. Paul, who, when he arose from the ground, said resolutely: *"Domine, quid me vis facere?"* (Acts IX, 6) and offered himself to God without reserve. If we only had the courage to do what God wills, how easy it would be to lay aside our faults and combat our evil passions!

(e) As regards *satisfaction,* the present-day prac-

tice has reduced this element of Penance to a minimum. If we have the true spirit of compunction, we will not stop at the small penance usually imposed, but add voluntary acts of mortification.[10] How frequently do not Holy Scripture and the Church exhort us to penance! And how necessary is it to repeat and stress this admonition in this current age of excessive self-indulgence! The cry to do penance by no means finds a hearty response. Whence came the mysterious impulse which urged the Saints to perform heroic acts of penance? It came from the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of God showed them the guilt of the human race, the guilt of each individual man, the perversity of human nature,—and they were moved to penance. When we think of our parishes and the sins by which our people, young and old, offend God; when we consider our own *"innumerabilia peccata et negligentiae et offensiones,"* [11] what strong motives have we to do penance, not only by inwardly mortifying our passions,—which, of course, is most important,—but also by performing works of self-denial. The slackness which is apt to take hold of a priest, and the ineffectiveness of his endeavors to regain spiritual fervor, may sometimes be traced to a deep-seated dislike of corporal mortification. An act of penance performed now and then would dispel the heavy mists and revive the sinking spirits. I believe it would be worth our while to consider whether we could not do more in this respect. If we harbored a livelier spirit of penance, we should be

[10] Cfr. St. Ambrose, *De Poenit.*, II, 5; Migne, 16, 527.

[11] Offertory of the Mass.

much happier. That sounds like a paradox, but it is the literal truth. True, the pastoral charge entails a considerable amount of penance, especially if the work is arduous; but that circumstance did not keep the Saints from performing many acts of severe mortification. We are not expected to imitate their severity, but we can and should observe greater moderation in the use of food and drink, greater regularity and strictness in our daily routine. If we did this, our work would be more efficient, and we could meet death more calmly. The sacramental satisfaction for our sins would thus receive a considerable increment.

2. Let us be ever mindful of the purity of heart which our exalted office demands. "He who enters the priesthood ought to be as pure as if he were placed among the angelic powers of Heaven." [12] Let us bear in mind that we live and labor in a world steeped in wickedness (1 John V, 19). "How much force and violence do you think a priest ought to exercise to preserve his soul from defilement and keep its spiritual beauty untouched?" [13] How many demands are made every day upon our virtue! "The soul of a priest resembles a ship tossed by the waves; from all sides he is buffeted, by friends and enemies, by his own and by strangers." [14] If we realize this, we shall feel constrained to receive the holy Sacrament of Penance frequently throughout the

[12] St. Chrysostom, *De Sacerdot.*, III, 4; Montfauc., I, 467.
[13] St. Chrysostom, *De Sacerd.*, VI, 2; Montfauc., I, c. p. 516.
[14] St. Chrysostom, *In Act. Apost.*, Homil. 3, 5; Montfauc., IX, 3, 4.

year. "He who accuses himself truthfully and loves God ardently, will go to confession frequently." [15] How often shall we go? Happy the priest who has the opportunity of going every week! An old pastoral instruction lays down this rule: "Go to confession every week, to the same confessor if possible; if you put it off beyond two weeks, you show indifference." [16] Go to confession at least twice a month if you can. This is a good rule for the reason that by observing it we can gain all the indulgences that require as a condition the reception of the Sacraments.[17] And whenever we go to confession, let us do it *humiliter, pure et fideliter,* pierced with grief, full of compunction, not as a mere matter of habit, but willingly, with true sorrow for our sins and inspired by fervent love, as St. Lawrence admonishes.[18] Let us always remember that we are dealing with a Sacrament, a holy thing of unspeakable grandeur, and let us be filled with secret awe at the mysterious meeting between God and our soul, which is suffused with the blood of Jesus Christ! "Blessed are they that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb; that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city" (Apoc. XXII, 14).

[15] St. Lawrence Just., *l.c.*

[16] *Instructio Cleri Herbipol.*

[17] According to a decree of the S.C.I., given February 14, 1906, all who receive Holy Communion daily, or almost daily, *in statu gratiae, recta piaque mente* can gain all indulgences, even without weekly or biweekly confession.

[18] *Op. cit.*

II. I will now take up another theme of great importance, namely, the priest's *daily order of life.*

It would be superfluous to expatiate on the *necessity* of system and order in the daily life of the priest. Even those who follow no definite order admit the necessity of some sort of schedule. St. Augustine says:[19] "A disorderly man is a burden unto himself." He is also, we may add, a striking *argumentum ex absurdo* for the necessity and usefulness of order in a priest's life.

The daily life of the parish priest is spent mostly in prayer, study, vocational activities, and recreation. All these things should be attended to in a fixed order, with a particular task assigned to each hour if possible.

1. In the first place rise promptly at the appointed time. This rule may involve a sort of daily mortification, but it should be strictly enforced. In the days when the seminary bell performed its duty for us every morning, without consideration or mercy, it did not seem quite so difficult to get up early. If we lived in a monastery and a brother would rap at our door each morning, it would probably not be so hard either; but when one is left to one's self, one easily becomes careless in rising and thus interrupts the daily order at its very start, especially if one has gone to bed late. Rising late is apt to spoil the daily meditation, the preparation for holy Mass, the Mass itself, nay, frequently the whole day. Lack of magnanimity and mortification entails a distaste for the spiritual life, which

[19] *Confess.*, I, 12.

grows with time.[20] An ascetical writer, speaking of the impediments to virtue, devotes a long chapter to indolence in rising, demonstrating its wickedness, its disadvantages, and the efforts that should be made to overcome it.[21] He gives this advice: Leap out of bed with a courageous jump at the appointed time! Why do so many priests fail to observe this rule? We should be amply repaid for the inconvenience of early rising by being able to offer up to God the glorious morning hours. Many take home with them from a retreat the resolution to rise promptly hereafter,—but behold, already on the first or second morning, when the clock strikes six and the occasion calls for a *hic Rhodus, hic salta,* there is no response. Holy Scripture urges us: "At the time of rising be not slack" (Eccli. XXXII, 15), and again (Wisd. XVI, 28): "We ought to prevent [*i. e.,* precede] the sun to bless Thee, and adore Thee at the dawn of light."

2. After rising say a short *morning prayer,* make a *good intention* for the whole day's work, and then begin your *daily meditation.*

(a) We may assume that no priest leaves the seminary who is not impressed with the necessity of making a daily meditation. This meditation should, if pos-

[20] "Consecrate to the Lord the first-fruits of the day! For the whole day belongs to him who first took possession of it. . . . From the morning hours I can tell how the rest of the day will turn out" (John Climacus, *Grad.,* 26).

[21] Bellecius, *Virtutis Solidae Praecipua Impedimenta,* P. I, c. 6. Ratisbon, 1755, pp. 249 ff.

sible, be made in the morning. Unfortunately, the good resolution made in the seminary is not always kept. Instead of the priestly life being enveloped more and more by an atmosphere of interior prayer, there is an awful void: no meditation whatever, or a halting, careless way of meditating, then an intermission of a number of days, and occasionally something that only remotely resembles a meditation.

What are the *consequences* of such carelessness? A constantly growing poverty of *spirit.* The careless priest loses his hold upon the great ideas that should uphold and support him. *"Defecit spiritus"* (Ps. CXLII, 7) *"quoniam defecit manna"* (Jos. V, 12). One loses the knowledge of one's self. Meditation is like a mirror into which we look: our duties, our faults, are perceptible there. He who does not meditate regularly, no longer sees himself and forgets his duties. Lack of meditation makes a priest like an empty well, incapable of supplying water to others. It brings on a want of ideas in sermons and sterility in exhorting penitents in the confessional and at the sick-bed. At length he has nothing more to dispense than a few trite phrases, like a physician who has ceased to study and depends on a few obsolete prescriptions. How often do not sermons furnish palpable evidence that the preacher is not a man of meditation. He who meditates regularly commands a wealth of thought, expressions, applications, that furnish him and others with wholesome spiritual food. *"Ex plenitudine contemplationis derivatur praedicatio."* [22] Often in the confes-

[22] St. Thomas Aqu., *S. Th.,* 2a 2a, qu. 188, a. 6.

sional an idea will come to the zealous priest as a fruit of his morning meditation,—a thought peculiarly fitted for this particular penitent. By neglecting the practice of meditation we not only become poorer in ideas, but our heart grows cold. The sublime truths of Christianity not only possess the power of illuminating the mind, but they fill the heart. If our intellect craves truth, the heart craves love,—love for God, for Christ, for Mary, for the Angels and Saints, for the Church, for souls. Love for everything great and good in the supernatural and natural order receives its daily nourishment through meditation. *"In meditatione exardescet ignis"* (Ps. XXXVIII, 4). How beautiful is this heavenly love in the heart of a priest! How this fire enkindles and warms others when the mouth of the priest speaks from the abundance of a heart rich in love (Matth. XII, 34). Does it require more than a quarter of an hour's conversation with such a priest to discover that his heart is enkindled with lofty and eternal ideals? *"Lingua animae devotionis fervor."* [23] But how sad is it to note the gradual change in the heart of a priest in whom the fire of meditation has burned out! He may have in his library a book of meditations from his seminary days, but it is covered with dust. *"Aruit cor meum, quia oblitus sum comedere panem meum"* (Ps. CI, 5). What a contrast between such a priest and the things that surround him! the sanctuary lamp is ever burning, the candles glow heavenward, the censer pours out clouds of incense, the Mass prayers are full of fervor. In the Blessed

[23] St. Bernard, *In Cantic.*, S. 45, 7.

Sacrament, before which he goes back and forth, dwells He who said (Luke, XII, 49): "I am come to send fire on the earth." What is even worse, when neglect of meditation has expelled the love of God from his heart, another fire starts to burn there,—the fire of sinful passion, and ere long the priest's heart is aflame with a love that is anything but divine. The spirit of the world is for ever attacking us; whoever fails to fortify himself against this insidious enemy by interior prayer, cannot hope to escape his fatal snares. A priest who has cut his bark loose from the safe anchorage of meditation, easily drifts into one of two vortexes that have drawn many into ruin, *viz., luxuria* and *ambitio*. St. Alphonsus has expressed the belief that a priest can scarcely be saved without meditation, for the reason that one who neglects this important duty is not apt to be faithful in the performance of his other duties. "If the door of mental prayer is locked," says St. Teresa, "then I know not how grace is to enter the soul. . . . He who neglects interior prayer, needs no devils to cast him into hell; he does it himself." [24] A soul called by God to His special service can hardly get to Heaven without meditation, for it is impossible to become perfect without practicing interior prayer. Gerson says: Except by a special miracle of God, no one can attain to the perfect practice of the Christian religion "without the regular use of meditation." Yet who is in duty bound to become perfect if not the priest, whose vocation is not

[24] *Life*, ch. 19.

a *"status acquirendae, sed exercendae perfectionis"?* [25] It is an unfortunate error to suppose that a priest needs only to be slightly more zealous than laymen.

(b) A few practical questions. *How long* should I meditate every day? Many holy doctors say, two hours. St. Francis de Sales [26] writes: "Devote an hour every day before noon, and, if possible, one of the first hours of the morning to meditation." One hour a day is little enough, but even this might be too much for us, although a truth will penetrate more deeply in an hour than in half an hour. The minimum should certainly be half an hour each day. This half-hour may be made to serve as a preparation for saying Mass, by dwelling on the holy Eucharist and, in conclusion, combining the oral colloquium with the approaching sacrifice. On days when a priest, owing to the pressure of pastoral duties, finds it difficult to meditate for a full half-hour, let him at least join to his morning prayer a reflection lasting ten or fifteen minutes, or attentively read a page or two upon a suitable truth. God will bless his good will.[27]

On what subjects should I meditate? On any truth or mystery of our holy religion. You can take a verse

[25] Cfr. Manning, *The Eternal Priesthood,* p. 55.

[26] *Intr. à la Vie Devote,* II, 1.

[27] "Those who are prevented by their business and labor from devoting so much time [one and one-half to two hours] to this exercise, should not omit to contribute, with the poor widow in the Gospel, their mite to God; if they neglect nothing on their part, He who gives to every creature what is necessary, will generously grant them all they need." (Peter of Alcantara, *Libellus Aureus,* P. I, c. 12, doc. 6.)

from Holy Scripture and reflect upon it, or an antiphon, or a Psalm from the Breviary, or (which is very advisable), the *Missa diei.* The introit often contains an abundance of matter for reflection. Or you can take a book of meditation and follow the order given there. How prolific, profound, and solid are, for example, the meditations of Da Ponte, how charming those of Meschler, how stimulating those of Chaignon, which have become the daily food of so many ecclesiastics! Meditating on the life of Christ is particularly commendable, for Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life." Nothing surpasses His words and deeds for beauty, loveliness, and fertility. Be not like a butterfly fluttering to some other book of meditation every year. It takes a long time to exhaust a good meditation book and draw from it all its substance.

How should I meditate? Read over the points of your meditation the evening before. There is a great advantage in this practice. It gives the soul something to ruminate upon. During meditation, refer to the book as often as necessary, reread, or, if you grow tired, read and reflect on it sentence for sentence. A priest who says he cannot meditate can surely read, and reflect on what he reads, for half an hour. Arouse in your soul sentiments of thanksgiving, love, contrition, joy, etc. Let your good resolution be concrete, practical, and adapted to your special needs. In conclusion recite an oral prayer.

Some make a daily meditation, but a poor one. They deceive themselves and try to fool their conscience with a counterfeit of the real thing. A so-called dry medi-

tation is by no means necessarily a bad one; it may seem ineffective, yet sink in deeply. To meditate is a splendid exercise of devotion and love, even though it be done entirely without emotion. Practice the rule, *"vince teipsum."*

(c) Would that we were all convinced of the great importance of daily meditation for the sacerdotal life! Would that we all made an earnest effort to meditate and did not shrink from the self-denial which it imposes! We should learn so to love the fruits of meditation that we should never leave off again; we should thereby acquire that most valuable of sciences, the science of divine love, which is not derived from books, but from the crucifix and the Blessed Sacrament.[28] How many learned priests pass through life without a knowledge of this highest of all sciences, and how many simple priests possess it, and, as a consequence, are *"lucernae ardentes et lucentes"* (John V, 35), bearing light and fire within their souls and diffusing it round about!

I shall conclude with some words which St. Bernard once addressed to Pope Eugene IV:[29] "It suffices to admonish you not to give your whole self nor your whole time to activity, but to reserve a part of yourself, of your heart, and of your time for reflection. I say this with a view to necessity, not to mere propriety . . . Contemplation first of all purifies the mind; secondly, it governs our emotions, directs our acts, corrects our excesses, controls our morals, adorns and

[28] St. Alphonsus.
[29] *De Consideratione,* I, 7, 8.

regulates our life; finally, it bestows knowledge of divine as well as human things . . . Failure to cultivate this pious and useful practice,—is it not equivalent to losing life itself?"

SECOND CONFERENCE

HOLY MASS. THE BREVIARY. EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE. STUDY.

I. THE real sun of the priest's life is the *Mass.* From it light, warmth, and life flow into his soul. The Mass is, in fact, the sole reason for the existence of the priesthood. Without it there would be no priests in the New Testament. Is your soul as completely wrapped up in the Mass as its importance demands? What does the Mass mean to you? This question decides your worth as a priest. Your relation to the Mass is the thermometer indicating the state of your interior life.

1. But, alas, there are degrees in a priest's life: his zeal may be below freezing point, or near freezing, or a few faint points above. Let us briefly follow this line of thought.

(a) Lowest in the scale is the *sacrilegious* Mass. This is often the result of a lukewarm life. A strong temptation arises and is followed by deliberate mortal sin. Mass is celebrated because the people expect it.[1]

[1] *"Necessitate compulsus obtuli holocaustam";* 1 Kings XIII, 12.

What if this is done *"ante purgatam conscientiam, ante exomologesin factam criminis,"* [2] although confession is possible, and if it happens a second time, perhaps even with less unrest, and finally is oft repeated? Oh, that would mean black night in the life of the priest! St. Thomas teaches [3] that a sacrilegious Communion is not the most grievous of all sins and that the expressions of the Fathers that it is on a par with the sin of Judas and the crucifixion of Our Lord, are to be taken in a mystic sense, just like the word of the Apostle that sinners "crucify again to themselves the Son of God" (Hebr. VI, 6). Yet the crime of receiving Holy Communion unworthily is terrible enough, and a *missa sacrilega* involves peculiar malice.[4] It is a frightful desecration of the *sacra mysteria,* a terrible abuse of the sublime privilege and power of the priesthood, an act of flagrant ingratitude and insolent defiance toward our Divine Redeemer. St. Isidore of Pelusium thus addresses the unworthy celebrant: "Do you not shudder to approach the altar? How dare you touch the spotless mysteries? I exhort you either to cease doing so, or to remain away from the holy altar of sacrifice, lest you call down fire from Heaven upon your head." [5] "No one," says St. Chrysostom," would dare to receive a king disrespectfully. What say I, a king? No one

[2] St. Cyprian, *De Lapsis,* c. 16.

[3] *Summa Th.,* 3a, qu. 80, a. 5.

[4] According to St. Alphonsus it involves four, according to De Lugo and others (perhaps more correctly) two sacrileges. Cfr. Ballerini-Palmieri, *Opus Theol. Mor.,* IV, 680; Lehmkuhl, *Theol. Mor.,* 10th ed., n. 35, 3.

[5] *Epist.,* V, 12.

would even dare to handle the king's garments with soiled hands. How then dare we treat the body of the God-Man, which is above everything, this pure, immaculate body, united to the Divinity, by which we have breath and life, by which the gates of hell were demolished and those of Heaven opened,—how dare we treat this body with contumely? Let us not, I beseech you, destroy ourselves by such impudence." [6] "Violence is offered to the body and blood of the Lord," we may say with St. Cyprian; "they attack the body of the Lord, they offend the Lord by their hands and mouth." [7] *"Vide, quid agas, sacerdos, nec febrienti manu* [sick of sin and with a feverish hand] *corpus Christi attingas!"* Thus St. Ambrose addresses the sacrilegious priest.[8] If he does it nevertheless, he desecrates the blood of the Lord, whose "purple," as the same Saint says, "imbues the souls of Saints and makes kings." [9] What an unnatural sound the words of the Mass have when they come from the lips of a sinful priest, or rather, what infamous insults, as an old writer says,[10] does he utter! *"Iudica me Deus,"* he dares to say, while the *Mane, Thecel, Phares* is written on his brow. He lets the servers answer: *"Et cum spiritu tuo,"* while an altogether different spirit is within him. *"Lavabo inter innocentes,"* he says,—

[6] *In I. Ep. ad Cor.,* Hom. 24, 4; Montfauc., X, p. 253.

[7] *L. c.,* c. 15. 16.

[8] *De Viduis,* c. 10, n. 65; Migne, 16, 267.

[9] Cfr. *Expos. in Ps.,* CXVIII, Sermo 17; n. 20, Migne, 15, 1522.

[10] *"Immundae infamiae"; Dionysius, Ep.;* cfr. St. Thomas, *S. Th.,* 3a, q. 64, a. 6.

"inter innocentes," he who is *"immundus corde et manibus."*—*"Sursum corda,"* he says, while his heart clings to a despicable creature. Without dread he thrice says *"Sanctus!"*—and, as the representative of Christ, takes the sacred Host into his unclean hands while he speaks of the *"sanctae et venerabiles manus"* of the Saviour;—and so on. Does not the entire liturgy of the Mass with its ceremonies and prayers seem almost a mockery in the hands of such a priest?

But let us turn away from this dismal *mysterium iniquitatis;* let us be warned and zealously employ the two great remedies that promise us certain protection, namely, assiduous prayer and frequent confession.

(b) There is another way of celebrating Mass which is not sacrilegious, but inspires anxiety. It is the *lukewarm* way of doing it. If continued for a long time, it will cause spiritual marasmus in the soul of the priest. The sacred function grows tedious to him, he becomes surfeited, and the Mass loses its charm. We are familiar with the blasé tourist who is bored by the grandest scenery. Would that there were no blasé participants in the Eucharistic Sacrifice of the Altar, none who gaze upon that most beautiful, nay, divine act with weariness or indifference!

(c) A third manner of celebrating the Mass is not so bad as the two just mentioned, yet it is not as it should be if the priest harbors involuntary distractions while his body stands at the altar and his hands consummate the *"tremendum sacrificium."* These dis-

tractions are not, *in actu,* voluntary; they are usually the result of human frailty rather than of moral guilt; or again they may be a trial sent by God, a concomitant of psycho-physical indisposition, etc. But with some priests they are merely an inevitable consequence of general distraction, of a lack of mental concentration. There is no inward fervor at Mass; merely shallow feelings, faintly flickering affections; and the thanksgiving after Mass is a worthy continuation of the distractions. The results are evident; they are fruitless Communions, and the *"diabolicum miraculum"* that so many daily Communions produce no visible effect. *"Miseri, qui quotidie corpus Domini tractamus et sumimus et a vulneribus nostris non curamur."* [11]

2. When St. Joseph of Cupertino was asked, what was most necessary to reform the clergy, he answered: "Let them celebrate Mass worthily and say the Breviary with devotion,—*ecce reformatio cleri plena!*" More urgent than a hundred other problems that agitate us at present is the question how we say Mass and how we recite the Divine Office. The Mass and the Breviary are the chief means of sanctification for the priest and the principal fountains from which he must draw supernatural strength and blessing for his labors day by day. Let us examine whether our manner of celebrating the Mass might not be improved upon, whether our zeal has perchance subsided and needs to be stirred up, whether defects have crept in

[11] St. Peter Chrysologus, Sermo 33; Migne, 52, 295.

that should be corrected. It behooves us always to surround our celebration of holy Mass with a careful preparation and an ardent thanksgiving. These two simple exercises will help us to say Mass more becomingly.

The *preparation* should be remote and proximate. The best remote preparation is a continuous and devout study of the Mass. Many of us devote too little time to the consideration of this great mystery. We should meditate frequently on the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament. Every night we should retire with the thought: *"Cras cum rege pransurus sum"* (Esther V, 15). To-morrow I shall say Mass again. This will give our evening hours an air of holiness. In the morning it will be well to add to the usual meditation an extra quarter of an hour of special preparation. The *accessus* of the Missal with its splendid selection of Psalms should be given the preference. Those are wondrous tunes which the Church aims to awaken in our soul by means of these Psalms. St. Chrysostom says that a priest should not approach the altar until his soul glows. This is not always easily accomplished. Often the soul is like a damp log that sizzles and smokes when laid on the fire, and will dry out and burn only gradually. The soul becomes warm by a good meditation, and when it glows, you are ready. If the preparation has been good, the Mass will be good.

How much time shall I spend in *thanksgiving?* A quarter of an hour is the minimum. These are precious moments! The soul of the priest is completely immersed in the boundless ocean of the Divine Essence,

intimately united with the God-Man,—His soul and body, His flesh and blood. Ah, what a light there is in your soul illuminating the paths of the King of Glory! This is the time to do business, says St. Teresa. Whoever neglects these precious moments is imprudent. Then comes the *recessus,*—prayers of petition and an offering of the day's work; a renewal of the *votum castitatis* and the *propositum particulare.* You can gain a plenary indulgence by reciting the prayer: *"En ego, O bone Iesu,"* with a few Our Fathers *ad intentionem Papae,* or a litany or part of the Rosary.

Let us do all we can to celebrate holy Mass more devoutly! It may be well occasionally to look through our *registrum missarum.* How many Masses we have said! How the days fly! As every day is noted in the register, so also it is recorded in the world beyond. My God, how deeply we may be in debt before Thee on account of our Masses! *"Non modica res, unam missam facere, et valde felix est, qui unam missam digne celebare potest!"* [12] It is high time to rise. *"Eheu, Christophore, tempus est surgendi!"*

II. Now a few words about the *Breviary.* We know how the Divine Office should be recited according to the mind of the Church. How do we recite it? Let us examine ourselves on this point.

1. The Breviary is the public prayer which the Church, the Spouse of Christ, unceasingly directs to

[12] Alexander II, A. D. 1065.

God. It is "a daughter of the celestial hymnody which is chanted forever before the throne of God and the Lamb." [13] It is not a private prayer, for we are the official messengers of the Church before the throne of God. It is a prayer largely composed of divinely inspired words [14] and hence a model prayer, wholly based upon the teaching of our faith, imbued with the spirit of God, full of truth and beauty, of strength and fervor, and of magnificent poetry. It is a prayer of the highest intrinsic value and of extraordinary efficacy. One single *hora* is more effective than many private prayers, says St. Alphonsus. What a stream of blessing flows over the Church and the world, over the living and the dead from the Breviary! Together with the holy Sacrifice of the Mass this great prayer of the Church is one of the pillars sustaining not only the Church, but the whole world.

What a profound significance has the Breviary for each one of us personally! *"Septies in die laudem dixi tibi"* (Ps. CXVIII, 164)! How many blessings, how much merit can this daily prayer obtain for us! How much solace and joy will these wonderful hours of prayer infuse into the soul of the priest! In a human way we often feel lonesome, especially if we are stationed in the country,—on long winter days, in the midst of people among whom there is perhaps not one with whom we can enter into closer relations.

[13] Urban VIII.

[14] *"Psalmus . . . virtutum est organum, quod S. Spiritus plectro pangens Propheta venerabilis caelestis sonitus fecit in terris dulcedinem resultare."* (St. Ambrose, *Expos. in Ps.*, I, n. 11; Migne, 14, 969.)

But what a glorious company we enter when we take up our Breviary! God, the highest, the sweetest Spirit, comes to us *"in adiutorium."* The venerable Patriarchs and Prophets of Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the Saints of every century, pass before us. The great epochs of the Church's history are unrolled before our eyes. Yesterday we commemorated St. Ignatius, that spiritual giant, upon the background of a terrible period! To-day we are led back fifteen centuries and behold a touching picture of the primitive Church: Peter peacefully slumbering between two watchmen and liberated by an Angel,—a foreshadowing of the history of the papacy, a continuous series of persecutions and deliverances. To-morrow will take us to the eighteenth century, to a Saint of the age of Voltaire,—St. Alphonsus, that great *Doctor Ecclesiae,* with his intense devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Mother of God. To-day, the *Inventio S. Stephani* shows us the primitive Church with its profound veneration for the relics of the Martyrs. To-morrow, St. Dominic, of the twelfth century,—a different time with different enemies to combat. On Aug. 5 is the Blessed Virgin's miraculous feast *Ad Nives.* On Aug. 6, the Transfiguration sends its rays far into the life of the priest, who stands on a sort of Thabor of his own each morning, enveloped in a *nubes lucida.*

Thus the Breviary opens to us an ever-changing spiritual vista. Association with men, even with the best of them, cannot satisfy us fully;—but oh, how delightful it is to converse in the Holy Office with

Jesus and Mary, whose company has nothing bitter (Wisd. VIII, 16). If we are weary of earthly strife and the jarring contentions that surround us, the gates of eternal peace open before us in the Breviary; an entirely different atmosphere, a bright, free, and joyous world greets us, the heavenly Jerusalem hails us from afar! The devout recitation of the Office has a soothing, healing, pacifying effect that cannot be obtained by any other means. And what a dear, trustworthy companion the Breviary is upon life's journey! Day by day it whispers into our ears the grandest truths, discloses to our gaze the most fascinating spiritual sights, acquaints us with the noblest minds that ever lived on earth, accompanies us through life with the sweet song of the Psalms, and never forsakes us in good or evil days. No good priest can dispense with the Breviary. The feasts, the holy personages, the Psalms gradually become so familiar that he cannot bear the thought of parting with them. In course of time parents, friends, acquaintances pass away, but the celestial, glorified friends in the Holy Office remain with us till the close of our earthly day, and will be our personal companions for ever in Heaven. Finally, what a rich harvest will repay us in eternity for the many hours of prayer which we have sown in the furrow of life! Our Breviary, like sacerdotal celibacy, is one of those precious gifts which the loving Saviour has bestowed upon His priests. *"O si scires donum Dei!"* (John IV, 10). Blessed is he who appreciates this precious jewel given him on the day of his betrothal, *i. e.,* when he received subdeaconship!

2. That is what the Breviary could and should be to us. What is it in reality? Is not the contrast between the ideal and the real altogether too great with some of us priests? The tent of Moses as it appeared in the vision was gloriously resplendent, but his actual tent was made of poor skins. Many things are marred by human imperfection. Would that it were *only* imperfection! "In many of our actions," says St. Bernard,[15] "there is need of vigilance, but especially in prayer." Who of us would dare to assert that he has never been deficient in this regard! And who would claim exemption when this Saint says that "there are those who at times experience such dryness and dullness of mind that they do not sufficiently attend to what they say or to whom they are speaking, for the reason that they approach prayer as it were from habit, without due reverence and solicitude"? The thought of the responsibility incurred before God, and the long purgatory that awaits him in consequence of careless recitation of the Breviary, alarms many a priest, and with good reason. Let us renew our zeal for this *opus Dei, cui nihil praeponetur!*[16] Here are a few hints that may prove helpful.

The great model of the priest's private Office is the public choir service of certain religious Orders. How highly was this prayer esteemed in more devout ages! Every nation had its national sanctuary, where the Psalms were sung night and day. The choir monks

[15] *Sermo de Divers.*, 25, 8.
[16] *Regula S. Benedicti.*

were looked upon as the palladium of the realm. Charlemagne did not disdain to chant the Psalms with the Benedictines. We must take this choir prayer for our example. It is advisable for us occasionally to visit a monastery where the Holy Office is devoutly recited in public. It would teach us to observe a respectful outward demeanor. Our exterior bearing should reflect interior devotion. It is best to say the Office kneeling or standing. St. Charles Borromeo always said the Office on his knees; the holy Curé of Ars was wont to kneel on the sacristy floor without any support. It may also be fitly done *deambulando,* especially after one has been sitting for a long time. Where there is much noise or loud talking, it is impossible to pray well. Then, let us not pray too hurriedly. "Do not cut the words in half, or skip them entirely, or yawn, but utter these words of the Holy Ghost with reverence and fervor." [17]

We should recite the Divine Office *attentively.* There are three kinds of attention, *viz.,* advertence to the sense, to the words, or to God or some mystery of our holy religion. The last, which may be compared to the meditative recital of the Rosary, can be properly alternated with the second, and a combination of both may be regarded as the most perfect kind of attention.[18] This method involves no great effort and gives free scope to the heart.

Whenever we are about to discharge our obligation of prayer, let us recall the admonition of the Holy Spirit:

[17] St. Bernard, *In Cant., Sermo* 47, 8.
[18] Lehmkuhl, *Theol. Mor.,* II, 634, 4.

"Ante orationem praepara animam tuam" (Eccli. XVIII, 23). We should prepare ourselves before every prayer, and *a fortiori* before every hour of the Divine Office. May not the fact that we are often so dissatisfied with our prayers be attributed to a hasty start, a precipitate jumping from work to prayer, without real preparation? What blessings would it bring to us if we recited at least part of the Office *coram Sanctissimo* every day! Many provincial councils warmly recommend this practice.[19]

Lastly, we must have the right *intention*. The general intention is indicated by that splendid passage in the preparatory prayer: *"Domine, in unione illius intentionis, qua ipse in terris laudes Deo persolvisti, has tibi horas persolvo."*—*"In unione divinae intentionis,"* how this intention elevates us! Oh, if we could have spent a night in prayer at the side of Jesus, if He had revealed to us His intentions, what a glorious experience that would be! And what a source of blessings! Now we unite ourselves every day with those intentions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus when it still beat on earth. To this high pitch the Church wishes to attune our daily recitation of the Breviary. Therefore, O Priest of God, if you should again begin to fall into the habit of praying mechanically, oh, rise once more, *"in unione illius divinae intentionis!"*

[19] For example, the Council of Prague, 1860: *"Proderit plurimum, ubi fratres habitant in unum* [pastor and assistants], *si quantum fieri poterit, sociati divino officio vacaverint. Qui socium non habuerit, vadat ad eum, cuius mera praesentia in SS. Eucharistiae Sacramento nos docet orare cuiusque precibus nostras iungere et commendare discamus."* (*Coll. Lac.*, V, 422.)

Let us also elicit those *special* intentions which give zest and attractiveness to the Breviary! Interlace with your Office your own needs, those of your brethren and your people, all the needs of the Kingdom of God. Each hour may be devoted to a certain special intention. How much have we not to ask for ourselves! Make the intention to pray now for one virtue, now for another,—for chastity, patience, charity, self-control, etc. Or there may be some souls whose salvation is particularly dear to you. There are the children at school,—do not the school and the teachers well-nigh force themselves upon our intentions these days? There are the first communicants, the married people; there is a virgin that promises to devote herself entirely to God; a soul sorely tried; an innocent child in danger; an opponent whom we can reach, unknown to him, by the weapon of prayer; or some undertaking, a mission, a sermon, an instruction, etc. Thus a priest can entwine the entire inward and outward cares of his person and parish with the Holy Office, which thereby gains much in interest and freshness. And if we wish to include yet other interests, what an inexhaustible wealth of intentions presents itself to us throughout the Kingdom of God! The objects for which the Church prays on Good Friday afford us an example of a truly Catholic intention. In one or the other hour we ought to help the Holy Father wrestle against the gates of hell, or come to the aid of our bishop. As a rule it is better to pray for our superiors than to criticize them. We should pray, furthermore, for the heads of the civil government, against Socialism,

Liberalism, Freemasonry. This is wrestling in prayer, fighting *sub armis orationis* [20] with the sharp weapon of the *Officium Divinum.* Pray for a worthy choice at elections; taking part in politics in this manner, at the altar and in prayer, is a most effective and proper thing for priests. If you must enter the political arena for the sake of some higher interests, in defense of religion for example, you will be more secure and successful if you have first prayed upon the holy mountain. In this way the clergy may and should participate in current events, and by means of prayer they can achieve really great things.

III. Another part of the daily order of the priest should be a *visit to the Blessed Sacrament.* The word "visit" indicates a beautiful, intimate relation of friendship. If we consider who it is whom we visit, we cannot but look upon the daily *visitatio* as an incomparable prerogative, a privilege not enjoyed by the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Kings of the Old Testament. But how seldom do even devout persons take this view of the matter! If some high dignitary were to appear on the scene, they would hasten to welcome him; but in the tabernacle it is only—the Son of God! Here again we are struck by the manifold inconsistencies of Christians. Even the priest often fails to draw the necessary practical conclusions from his faith. The famous physiognomist J. K. Lavater said: "If I could believe that Christ is really present in the Sacrament, I should never rise from my knees." How many graces does a

[20] Tertull., *De Orat., c. ult.*

priest lose who is lax in visiting the Blessed Sacrament! The storms that arise in his soul would subside much sooner before the tabernacle. There is something wonderfully soothing and restful in the close proximity of the Holy Eucharist. *"Imperavit mari et ventis et facta est tranquillitas magna"* (Matth. VIII, 26). By frequently communing with the Heart of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament we can powerfully promote the interests of our parish. Our faith gains in depth, our spiritual horizon in breadth, our hearts become more magnanimous. Our moments of joy and overflowing solace are multiplied. Many priests find that peace which surpasses all understanding (Phil. IV, 7) at the foot of the altar. A priest who often visits our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament will irresistibly attract souls, according to the old adage, *"exempla trahunt."* The Priests' Eucharistic League achieves such astounding results because it multiplies visits to the Blessed Sacrament. How fortunate that so many priests belong to this society! It would be a pity if a priest were never found in church before the Blessed Sacrament, except when obliged to go there to discharge some official duty or function.[21]

[21] St. Alphonsus (*Rules and Principles for a Secular Priest*) says: "All this is the result of lack of love for Jesus. He who loves a friend, strives to visit him as often as he can, especially if he knows that his visits are welcome. By visit, however, I do not mean a few Our Fathers thoughtlessly said in passing the altar; no, I mean occupying oneself for a considerable length of time in pious aspirations to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and begging of Him graces, particularly the grace of perseverance, and His holy love. *Who* ought to appear oftener and longer before Jesus Christ than the priest, who causes Him to descend daily

IV. Permit me to add a few words about studying. *Why* should the priest study? *What* should he study? *How* should he study?

1. *Why* should the priest study? Because without constant study he cannot maintain a high standard, but will soon deteriorate, both spiritually and intellectually. If we cease to study, we shall forget how to think, and sink into the mire of intellectual decay. One who does not study cannot take part in the theological discussions that arise among priests, especially at clerical conferences. If difficult cases come up in the confessional, or in the guidance of souls,—and this is a matter of frequent occurrence,—he merely gropes his way. *"Nemo dat quod non habet."* Without studying, the priest is apt to deteriorate morally. Study is wholesome, vigorous work, by which the mind is exercised and filled with new ideas. The study of theology in particular offers magnificent truths, fills the soul with noble imagery, and preserves us from idle thoughts and dangerous reveries. Study implants virginity, for it helps the spirit to gain preponderance over the flesh, it opens fresh sources of joy, and gains respect and influence. In the companionship of good books the life of the priest moves, as it were, in a spiritual region, which offers him abundant food for thought, and compensates him for many things which he must deny himself. When the soul is bruised by contact with the hard facts of life, how pleasant and

from Heaven, takes Him in his hands, nourishes himself with His sacred flesh and blood, and locks Him up in the tabernacle for his own benefit, so as to find Him again as often as he wishes."

beautiful it is to take up a good book and be swept away to a peaceful and exalted realm! There is no better cure for pessimism.

2. *What* should we study? Above all *theology.* This proposition needs no proof. Theology is necessary to the priest and must not be neglected in favor of the great mass of light literature that is apt to lure him away from sacred science. Politics, sociology, art, languages, any natural science may be taken up, but our first love should always belong to theology. If a priest departs from this rule, he does it at his own risk. If need be, we can get along without an extensive knowledge of politics, history, arts, and languages, but we cannot get along without theology.

First in order comes *Sacred Scripture,* not merely for edification, but as a study. We should acquaint ourselves intimately with the Bible. The works of the Fathers, the declarations of councils, the practice of all great churchmen convincingly inculcate the lesson that the priest is in duty bound to familiarize himself with Holy Scripture. *"Nunquam de manibus sacra lectio deponatur,"* says St. Jerome.[22] The Bible was the first book which Cardinal Manning took up in the morning, and the last he laid down at night. St. Boniface in his letters again and again recommends the study of Holy Scripture. It is to be feared that the priest of to-day literally buries the Bible under a mountain of newspapers and magazines. And yet the Bible is *"THE BOOK,"* ἡ βίβλος. It is a perfectly wonder-

[22] *Ep. 3 ad Nepotian.,* n. 8.

ful instrument, from which the priest can extract the choicest and most appropriate music on every occasion that may arise in his ministry. The Spirit of God permeates all its pages from beginning to end. If we were filled with that spirit, we should be able not only to teach, to convince, and to correct, but to comfort, to charm, and to captivate. Our words would bear a heavenly accent. And how agreeable the study of Scripture is! The Apostle speaks of the *"consolatio scripturarum"* (Rom. XV, 4). There is sweet comfort in its pages, especially in times of universal confusion like the present.

Our study of the Bible should not, however, be limited to purely philological interpretation; it should penetrate to the very marrow, after the manner of the Fathers and the great theologians and exegetes of antiquity. Thus only shall we enter into the fullness, strength, and fertility of the Sacred Scriptures and quaff the water of life *plenis haustibus.* The special object of our study should be the Holy Gospels, in particular that of St. John.

Next after the Bible comes *dogmatic theology,* so justly called "the queen of theological disciplines." Without a thorough knowledge of the dogmatic teaching of the Church no priest can be a man of profound views and supernatural aspirations. What strange notions are sometimes uttered by priests, betraying a lamentable lack of dogmatic training. No wonder St. Alphonsus strongly insists on the study of dogma! Here, too, let us not be content with merely skimming the surface, but descend into the depths.

Of scarcely less importance is the study of *moral theology*. A priest should never stop studying his moral theology. One forgets so many things as time goes on, and there are so many new decisions! How many moral problems constantly arise owing to changes in the conditions of life! No priest can venture to lay aside the compass that alone will enable him to find his way through the turbulent sea of life.

There is a large number of other theological sciences in which the priest should be at home and the study of which is necessary, advantageous, and gratifying. Let me mention only Canon Law, the liturgy, apologetics, the natural sciences, pedagogy, sociology, church history, hagiology, art, literature, etc.

It is impossible to apply oneself to all these studies with equal zeal and thoroughness. We must needs specialize. But a correct order should always be observed. The main branches of theology come first; secondary and so-called favorite branches must not absorb all of a priest's time at the expense of those that stand *primo loco*. A good rule is: Study first what is necessary, then what is useful, and lastly what is merely agreeable.

A priest must be on his guard lest excessive reading of newspapers and magazines deprive him of the time, energy, and taste for more serious and systematic study. We are fully aware of the mighty power of the press and ready to do all we can for the propagation of good newspapers and reviews. But there are too few that are worthy of unreserved approval, and the ever-growing power of an evil, or at best in-

different, press may well fill us with alarm. Too much newspaper-reading weakens the mind, impairs the memory, dampens interest in intellectual work, and results in a superficiality and haste unknown to former ages. The priest, too, is liable to succumb to this danger, and excessive reading of newspapers and magazines has injured many a cleric. A person moving in public life, as priests do, cannot dispense with the newspapers,—even the ascetic Cardinal Manning read his *Times* every day;—but we must read judiciously, learn to skip unimportant things, and judge what we read in the light of the Gospel. Instead of being a pleasure, newspaper-reading often becomes an irksome task, for it shows how sadly the world is tainted, how false standards of living discredit the Decalogue, how public and private morality is falling into decay. Let us thank God that we are priests, far removed from the abominations unfolded before us by the daily record of crime. A good newspaper, on the other hand, may be a harbinger of joy, as when it reports progress in the Kingdom of God. Would that we had more of this type!

3. We should study with a *proper motive,* namely, to learn to know God better and to love Him more ardently. We may study whatever we will, it may appear to be ever so remote from God, yet it somehow leads to Him. *"Ut in omnibus honorificetur Deus"* (1 Pet. IV, 11) is the advice of St. Peter,—and it applies also to our studies. To study merely for the sake of acquiring fame or for pecuniary profit,

—St. Bernard [23] calls this *"scientiam suam vendere,"*— is unworthy of a priest. A legitimate and praiseworthy motive, on the other hand, is to obtain light and knowledge in order to guide others on the way to Heaven.

"Nulla dies sine linea." Study *assiduously.* Study means work. Reading without exertion can profit little. "In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat thy bread" (Gen. III, 19) applies here also. The right kind of study demands close application, endurance, and courage, especially in this age of frothy newspapers and light literature. Serious study conduces to a profitable employment of time, it reckons with the brevity of life, and "redeems the time" (Ephes. V. 16) which is so easily wasted by idle reading.

Let me summarize: Follow a fixed daily order, properly divided between prayer, study, and recreation. *"Mane semina semen tuum et vespere ne cesset manus tua"* (Eccles. XI, 6). How beautiful is the close of a day when, upon retiring, we devote the last few moments to our flock, commending all to God, and invoking His blessing upon all who are entrusted to our care or otherwise near and dear to us!

If we observe a regular daily programme, if we weave the golden thread of orderly work into the woof of our daily life, a precious fabric will result. "As many days, so many praises, as many months, so much gain," says St. Cyprian.[24] Let us be "in all things pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in

[23] *In Cantic., Sermo,* 3, 36.
[24] *Ep. 37 Moysi et Maximo, "Et cunctos,"* c. 1.

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the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might, . . . giving thanks to God the Father, who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the Saints in light" (Coloss. I, 10 ff.).

THIRD CONFERENCE

JESUS CHRIST, THE MODEL OF PASTORS

Our pastoral work must be of a high standard. It is no trade we are engaged in, no mere routine occupation, but *divinorum divinissimum.* Our eyes must ever be fixed upon the ideal pastor,—Jesus Christ. *"Ego sum bonus pastor,"* He says (John X, 11), and His pastoral activity lies before us like an open book. There is great fascination in studying the cure of souls as practiced by the Chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet. II, 25). Let us try to grasp a few features of this attractive subject and apply them to ourselves.

I. *The Fundamental Idea of Pastoration*

The fundamental idea of Christ as pastor of souls was to do the will of God and to honor Him. Our Lord Himself repeatedly expatiates on these two leading motives, and the Scriptural passages in question invariably have a mysterious and solemn tone.

1. *To do the will of God.* Christ is "the Servant of God," as the Prophet Isaias significantly called Him,

and He allows all things to be decided by His Heavenly Father, of whom He says: *"Pater maior me est."*

The scene of His pastoral labors was a small, obscure, and despised country. Why did He not choose one of the world's great capitals like Rome, or one of its great intellectual centres like Athens or Alexandria? Why did He choose Judea? Because it was the will of His Father. Let us apply this lesson to ourselves. Perhaps we are spending the years of our priesthood in a very humble place, in some corner of an obscure diocese. Neverthless our work is great and good. Why? Because the Father wills it. When we are tempted to complain and yearn for larger fields, let us calmly say: The Father wills that I should stay here, and I am satisfied. *"Ita, Pater, quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te"* (Matth. XI, 26).

Christ also let the *time* of His activity be decided by the Father. This is a remarkable fact. The will of His Father condemned Him to thirty years of apparent inactivity in a lowly village. For thirty years He waited patiently. Why? Because the Father willed it. *"Ego quae placita sunt ei facio semper"* (John VIII, 29). Here again we priests can learn a lesson from Him. If you have been in the same place for a long time and nature craves a change, ask yourself: What is the will of God? After all, the richest and poorest parishes all lead to the same goal, *viz.*: eternal happiness or eternal damnation! Perhaps you are anxious to secure a more permanent or a better paid position. Have you given due thought to the fact that the priest's permanent place is in Heaven or in hell?

There may be disagreeable burdens which you wish to shake off; but a change of position generally entails new and heavier burdens. For a while your new position may seem lighter, but soon it will weigh more heavily on your shoulders than the one you had before. *"Imaginatio locorum"* (the belief that things are better elsewhere) *"et mutatio multos fefellit,"* says the author of the *Imitation.*[1] May it not be the will of God that you should persevere in your present position, as our Lord persevered for thirty years at Nazareth, until His Father summoned Him to another sphere of activity,—public teaching, and that only for a short time? Humanly speaking Jesus died young, in the very flower of life. Why? Because His Father willed it so. *"Ita, Pater, quoniam sic fuit placitum ante te."* The modern tendency to prolong life by all possible means to extreme old age, has no justification in the example of our Divine Redeemer. If a priest is stricken as a young man, in the spring of life, he has an example in Jesus Christ, who gave up His precious young life for the salvation of men.[2]

Our Lord left to His Father also the selection of His *associates. "Quos dedisti mihi,"* He says of the Apostles in His prayer to the Father (John XVII, 24),

[1] *Imit. Chr.*, I, 9.

[2] *"Videamus, quid nobis promisit: Non divitias terrenas et temporales, non honores in saeculo isto. . . . Non ipsam postremo corporis sanitatem. . . . Non longaevitatem aut decrepitam senectutem, quam omnes optant, antequam veniat, omnes de illa cum venerit murmurant."* (St. Augustine, *Tr. in Ioann.*, 32, 9; Migne, 35, 1647.) *"Est enim perfecta aetas, ubi perfecta virtus est."* (St. Ambrose, *Or. De Obitu Theodos.*, n. 6; Migne, 16, 1450.)

from whom He received those who were to share with Him the work of saving souls. Do not imagine that those who labor with you in the cure of souls, either as assistants or superiors, were placed at your side by mere chance. No, they were appointed by a divine decree. Hence, if our colleagues in the priesthood do not always suit us, let us remember that Christ accepted His Apostles with patience and love from the hands of His Father. If we always viewed the matter in this light, our personal relations with our fellow-priests would be vastly improved. How different things would be if we regarded those who live and labor with us as appointed by God, (*"quos dedisti mihi"*) and treated them as helpmates. We ought not to forget that the Father expects us to treat them as brothers,—a duty which is so often violated by the clergy to the scandal of the faithful laity and to the injury of the good cause. *"Alter alterius onera portate"* (Gal. VI, 2). Every one of us has an *onus,* and is an *onus* to others, but these burdens are imposed by a higher hand.[3]

2. The other great fundamental motive of our Divine Saviour's conduct was the *honor of God. "Non quaeram gloriam meam"* (John VIII, 50). His labors belonged exclusively to God. The application is obvious. St. Augustine makes it in the following

[3] *"In hoc cognoscetur, quoniam discipuli mei estis, si vos invicem diligatis"* (John XIII, 34. 35). *"Huius autem dilectionis officium est, invicem onera nostra portare. Sed hoc officium, quod sempiternum non est, perducet sane ad beatitudinem aeternam, in qua nulla erunt nostra onera, quae invicem portare iubeamur."* (St. Augustine, *De Div. Quaestionibus,* 83, c. 71; Migne, 40, 80.)

eloquent words, which apply especially to priests.[4] "If He who is one with the Father and equal to the Father, God of God, co-eternal, immortal, . . . seeks the glory of His Father, and not His own, what then, O man, ought you to do? . . . Regard yourself: you are a creature, acknowledge the Creator; you are a servant, do not disdain your Lord; you have been adopted, but not by your merits; seek His Glory from whom you have this grace . . . If Christ sought the glory of Him who sent Him, how much more ought we to seek the glory of Him who made us?" But how easily and imperceptibly does self-interest enter into the aims and labors of even the noblest of men! What a gigantic struggle it costs us to suppress the ego so completely as to be able to say with the Saviour: *"Non quaeram gloriam meam."* Always there is a remnant of self-love secretly influencing us! Many a priest, if he examined his conscience and searched for the deepest motives of his pastoral and other activities, would perhaps find little pure gold, but much slag of personal glory, or, should that be unattainable, of personal *gloriola.* The *"inanis gloria,"* that *"virus virtutum,"*[5] is deep-seated and spoils many otherwise meritorious deeds. I believe it would startle us if we saw how large a share the ego has in even our most cherished works, how much of the harvest of merit is devoured by the monster of self-love! If we sought only the glory of God, our own glory would be secure. God Himself would see to it that we would not be the losers.

[4] *Tr. in Ioann.*, 29, 7; Migne, 35, 1631 f.
[5] St. Bernard, *Vita Malach.*, c. 1, 1.

II. *The Means Employed by Our Saviour in the Pastoral Office*

1. Our Lord began everything with prayer. We may say that He prayed uninterruptedly, whereas we precipitate ourselves into all sorts of undertakings without a thought of God. What good is to be expected from sermons preceded by much study, perhaps, but little prayer, from catechetical instructions without previous prayer and therefore devoid of real unction, from visits to the sick unaccompanied by prayer? How much greater is the effectiveness of a priest who is steeped in prayer! He moves in a supernatural atmosphere and enjoys the grace of sacred fecundity, obtained by his intercourse with God. *"Sicut ex Deo, coram Deo, in Christo loquimur"* (2 Cor. II, 17). How differently would we approach a person committed to our spiritual care if we first prayed for him! If we prepared every important affair by prayer, as St. Ignatius always did, we should be free from that unprofitable haste which we so often deplore after a mistake has been made. In this respect all the Saints were schooled by the Master and learned from Him how to insure the success of their undertakings by ardent and prolonged prayer.[6]

2. Another means employed by our Divine Re-

[6] "Let no one think that a busy life can not be a holy life; the most ordinary life can be full of piety. No life was ever so replete with work and interruptions as that of our Lord and His Apostles: surrounded by the multitudes coming and going, they often had not time to eat (Mark VI, 31). Nevertheless a busy life demands a punctual and uninterrupted habit of prayer." (Manning).

deemer in His pastoral office is the living *word*. He preached everywhere, upon the highways and byways, in the synagogue, in the Temple, at banquets, etc.; even on the last days before His Passion, (*"erat quotidie docens in templo"*; Luke XIX, 47). No place was too humble to serve him as a pulpit,—the dining-hall, the edge of the well, the ship. And what a wonderful preacher He was! What a deep understanding He showed in His sermons, what a wealth of imagery, what a great heart, what an ardent love for truth, what an intense zeal for souls, are manifested in His discourses! His simplicity and clearness even in the most profound matters are marvelous. How practical He was—always aiming at faith, penance, conversion! *"Deus magister est."* How effective was His preaching! If we visualize it according to the Gospel narrative, its appeal must have been simply overwhelming; people forgot to eat and drink and rushed out into the desert to hear Him.

So also should the word be employed by us as a means of pastoral activity, especially in sermons. But let us not seek ourselves when preaching. If we do, we shall soon reach our limit: the fountain of our own talent is not very deep and will soon become drained. No; let us preach Christ! Let us study Him first, and then preach Him in all His greatness, splendor, and significance. What an ocean of edification there is in the Gospels! Why will a simple Lenten sermon on the Passion of our Lord fill a large church? Because the personality of Christ exerts an undying charm upon the people. Why does the Church command us to read the Gospel to

the people Sunday after Sunday? Because in the Gospel the Divine Redeemer stands before the congregation exactly as He lived, spoke, and acted. How attractive and effective is a sermon if the preacher knows how to make the Person of Christ stand out from the golden background of the Gospel in a concrete, lifelike way and allows His life-giving words, His immortal ideas, His divine doctrine to work its effects! *"Pro Christo legatione fungimur tamquam Deo exhortante per nos"* (2 Cor. V, 20). How well the Fathers understood this truth! Everywhere in their writings we find the living Christ.

We should apply the Gospel to our times. There is much social wisdom in some of the sayings of our Lord; for instance, *"Misereor super turbam"* (Mark VIII, 2); *"Pauperes semper habetis vobiscum"* (Matth. XXVI, 11), etc., and in certain of His parables, such as those of Dives and Lazarus, the rich man (Luke XII, 16 ff.), etc., and that wisdom can and should be applied to the difficult problems of to-day. Dogmatic sermons are necessary first of all, for the ignorance of the people regarding the truths of our holy religion is as great as their carelessness in regard to the Commandments. Good, plain dogmatic sermons are always effective. In addition, it is necessary occasionally to preach on the so-called *praeambula fidei*. To-day it is no longer the supernatural, but the natural truths that are attacked, such as, for example, the existence of God, reward and punishment in the world beyond, the last end of man. Of the moral truths the need of penance and mortification should be particularly em-

phasized. This is a very opportune truth in our day of universal luxury and ease.

A sermon should be *"vivus et efficax"* (Hebr. IV, 12), not lame and unimpressive. Preaching is and always will remain a difficult task, requiring hard work, exhaustive study, and a supernatural point of view, especially if one has to address the same audience from year to year. Let us often meditate on the grandeur of the preacher's office, about which the Fathers and councils say such remarkable things. To this might be added a thorough examination of conscience as to how we habitually discharge this duty. Every sermon is a test of the priest's interior worth. "A few words by a saintly priest accomplish more than many words of human eloquence," says Cardinal Manning. Most of the Saints were very impressive preachers, who drew the sap for their sermons from the well-spring of a holy life. Loss of energy in the exercise of this office, especially before the advent of extreme old age, is often a symptom of spiritual decay.

A frequent and necessary form of preaching is *catechetical instruction.* Instructing children in the truths of religion is a wonderful practice, known only to Christianity. How the old pagan sages would marvel if they could enter one of our parish schools and hear the sublime truths propounded to little children by an earnest man clothed in black, who solves for them in simple words the great questions of human life, sin, and redemption! What an important office it is to implant in the tender minds of children the all-absorbing truths of our holy religion, to coax from their

young hearts the crop growing from the seeds implanted by Baptism! An occasional meditation on catechetics is necessary because this part of the pastoral office seems so insignificant and often becomes a tedious burden. Let us always keep before our mind the figure of Jesus instructing little children,—the loveliest scene depicted in the Gospels. What a blessed thing it is to instruct these little ones,—to save a goodly portion of humanity from destruction, to impress on tender minds truths never to be forgotten! Who has not in critical moments, when much depended upon a correct decision, suddenly remembered words spoken by the priest during catechetical instruction? How often we hear people say: "I was told that in school!" A pastor who neglects to impart catechetical instruction to the children of his parish regularly and to the best of his ability, will find it hard to justify himself before God and the Church.

Just a word about the best method of catechizing. It is a mistake to abandon all efforts at originality and content oneself with ready-made instructions found in books, using them as "pillows for the head and cushions under the elbows" (Ezech. XIII, 18). In this matter, too, it is true that we must eat our bread in the sweat of our brow.[7]

[7] "I will not ask how priests expect to justify themselves before the judgment-seat of God, who searches the hearts and knows the thoughts of men, if they give instruction either without preparation of any kind, or with no more attention than they would give to the most unimportant matter. I beseech and adjure you to regard the giving of instruction as one of the most important tasks, and to prepare for it as a matter of in-

3. We come to the third means employed by Jesus Christ in His pastoral work, namely, *miracles.* The miracles He wrought were chains by which He bound souls to Himself. Among the miracles reported in the Gospels were some that are properly looked upon as symbols of the *Sacraments,* those miraculous expedients of our pastorate, by which the Lord enables us to awaken the dead and heal the sick in a supernatural sense.[8]

What mighty instruments does not the Catholic priesthood possess in the "Sacraments of the dead"! The regeneration of mankind, the hope of the future, rests fundamentally upon Baptism and Penance. Baptism must regenerate the pagan peoples and transform them into Christians. There is no other possible way of helping them. So also in these times, when men are returning to paganism,—the waters of Baptism must repair the loss. And what can save present-day society, which is a conglomerate of erring souls, sick unto death and devoid of sanctifying grace?

dispensable duty. I beseech and adjure you to train your own congregation by training the children. Aim to be among your parishioners nothing less than Jesus was in the midst of the children!" (Bishop Sailer, *Pastoraltheologie,* 3d ed., München, 1812, II, 281 f.)

[8] St. Augustine says: *"Dominus enim noster Christus ea, quae faciebat corporaliter, etiam spiritualiter volebat intellegi. . . .* Ut *noverimus omnia miracula . . . valere ad admonitionem nostram, ut percipiamus ab eo, quod non est transitorium neque finem habiturum. . . . Et nunc maiores sanitates operature. . . . Modo caro caeca non aperit oculos miraculo Domine, et cor caecum aperit oculos sermoni Domini. Modo non resurgit mortale cadaver; resurgit anima, quae mortua iacebat in vivo cadavere."* (*Sermo 98, al. De Verbis Domini,* 44, 3 ff.; *Sermo 88, al. De Verbis Domini,* 18, 1 ff.; Migne, 38, 592 ff., 539 ff.)

Surely no new laws, no amelioration of social conditions, no commercial treaties, no school reform, but solely the Sacrament of Penance, which is the ordinary means of reviving dead souls. In these Sacraments, therefore, rests our hope of salvation. Christ illustrated the silent grandeur of these two Sacraments by such splendid miracles as the healing of the leper, of the man sick of the palsy, and of the invalid who had been affiicted for eight-and-thirty years.

Much, of course, depends upon the proper administration of these two Sacraments: first of Baptism, which the mercy of God has left to the sects, but which heresy so often frustrates; secondly and especially the Sacrament of Penance. How largely its efficacy depends on us priests! How easily it may become for us a source of terrific responsibility! What a vast amount of knowledge, virtue, and special qualification is required to be a good confessor! I will touch only a few points. Our Lord treated grievous sinners, *e. g.*, the adulteress, Mary Magdalen, and others, very gently. Herein He certainly set an example for the confessor. But He was deeply concerned that the sinner should not fail again. *"Iam noli peccare"* (John V, 14), He says emphatically. Ought we not to be just as solicitous? Moralists lay down certain principles regarding *occasionarii* and *recidivi,* designed to prevent further sins. These principles may be applied more or less strictly, according to the theological school the confessor wishes to follow, but he must always act according to principle. The priest must not be an absolution-machine performing his functions

mechanically. How disastrous it would be, for instance, if a confessor allowed sins which arise from voluntary occasions, keeping company, etc., to drag on for years, always accepting the penitent's promise to give them up, though he saw those promises broken again and again, whereas one refusal of absolution would descend like a stroke of lightning into this murky atmosphere! There is a great difference between confessors! Some know how to penetrate a seemingly general and harmless confession by a few well-chosen questions, and to lay bare and treat energetically the whole miserable condition of spiritual disease, whereas others never get to the bottom of things, never learn how deeply the disease is rooted. Such matters as the duties of one's state of life, the religious education of children, etc., are touched upon very timidly if at all by them. What a mistake it would be if the confessor were to let persons of the upper classes, who are usually more difficult to handle, slip through more easily, or if he failed to seize a marriage or other occasion when "a rare fish" gets into his net to make a lasting impression. A certain tact in handling penitents is very useful, but human respect would be a great detriment. Or in the case of women's confessions, which are like tepid water, it would be a serious mistake to dismiss the penitent without giving due attention to such questions as: "How do you train your children?" "Do you allow them to keep company?" "What do they read?" Often it is necessary to disillusion women with regard to their daughters. Fond mothers like to

think that their girls are angels beyond the reach of evil.

If we attend properly to the situation and needs of each individual penitent, our exhortations will be more apt and vigorous, and consequently more effective. It is very tiresome to repeat the same exhortation for three or four hours, alluding perhaps to the Sunday Gospel, and it does the penitent little good. The confessor should refer to the confession itself, touch upon something that is of real importance or necessity—the *passio dominans,* for instance. If the Gospel is used for purposes of exhortation, it should be applied to the individual needs of the penitent. People will be grateful to us if we help them in this way, and the office of confessor will be less burdensome. The priest's conduct in the confessional reveals the spirit that controls his life. It shows whether the example of Jesus Christ inspires his tongue, or whether he is a mere functionary who does all in his power to ossify the wonderful Sacrament of Penance.

The zealous administration of this Sacrament entails many advantages for the priest himself. It keeps him conscious of the sublimity of his calling; for the confidence which penitents show towards him in the confessional is due solely to his priestly character, not to his personality. In the tribunal of Penance he can learn more about psychology than from books. Hearing confessions is, moreover, a means of perfection and of increasing his own grace and merits, and earning a rich reward in Heaven. Confession is an institution which gives the priest an influence upon souls

that no earthly power can take away from him. If ethical principles were to disappear entirely from public life and the men became totally estranged from the Church, the confessional would still bring the priest in contact with women and children, and thus serve as a source of regeneration for the family and society in general.

4. Amongst the means employed by our Saviour for the sanctification of souls we find another that might well be imitated by us, namely, *blessing* the people. How often do the Gospels show our Lord in the act of blessing persons and things (Matth. XIV, 19; Mark X, 16; Luke XXIV, 50). In transmitting His powers to the priest in ordination, the Church does not overlook that of blessing. Recall the solemn and beautiful ceremony when the bishop anointed the hands of the neophytes with the words: *"ut quaecumque benedixerint, benedicantur."* These words were certainly not intended to be spoken in vain. To the hand of the priest there clings the sweet odor of sacerdotal anointment and the power of blessing. Let us make good use of it. Let us bestow blessings upon our people, the food they eat, the medicines they take, etc.

III. *The Saviour's Way of Dealing with Souls*

1. Our Divine Saviour was a man of the *people*. The *turbae* appear again and again in the Gospels (Matth. IX, 23; XIX, 2, etc.). In this point, too, we must strive to imitate Him. The priest must be a man of the people. Especially in our day, when the

political power is in the hands of the masses, we must make every effort to influence them in the right way. The clergy is the appointed medium of contact between the Church and the people. All the endeavors of the Popes are aimed at bringing the masses closer to religion and to the Church. Church festivities, sermons to non-Catholics, pilgrimages to sacred shrines, religious assemblies, etc., have great significance in our day, even though the human element is strongly mixed with them.

To influence the people effectively it is necessary to *organize* them into groups. When our Saviour got ready to feed five thousand people in the desert, He ordered them to sit down in groups of fifty (Luke IX, 14),—dividing them into companies, as it were. Co-ordination of the masses is attained by religious societies, which are very, very important to-day, whether they be societies of men or women, of young men or young women, etc. Organization facilitates the process of penetrating the individual strata of humanity with the leaven of Christianity, *"donec fermentatum est totum"* (Matth. XIII, 33).

2. But Jesus also dealt directly with *individuals, e. g.,* Nicodemus, the woman at Jacob's well, and many others. His private visits to certain houses, His participation in feasts, His interview with Nicodemus, however, bore no resemblance to those private friendships against which priests are warned because of possible harm to themselves and to others. Our Saviour's converse with individual souls was actuated by supernatural motives and of rare occurrence. But how

delicate, how psychologically masterful was His treatment of them! If studied attentively, it will reveal to us an abundance of valuable suggestions. The priest, too, must not treat all alike, but adapt himself to each class and person:—to the educated and the uneducated, to the refined and the coarse, to the rich and the poor, to laborers, farmers, men, women—*"omnibus omnia esse, ut omnes Christo lucrifaciat"* (cfr. 1 Cor. IX, 19).

3. In the pastoral methods of Christ we see the supernatural placed before everything else. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God" (Matth. VI, 33). So we, too, must always and everywhere seek first the Kingdom of God. The best way for us to combat pernicious social tendencies is by being the best possible pastors to our congregations. That is true social work, followed, as a matter of necessity, by other activities, especially for the betterment of material conditions. The Master often relieved bodily distress first and then reached out for the soul, thereby indicating to us the method we must pursue both in lesser and in greater things. In lesser things, for instance, by kindliness, affability, almsgiving, attention to the sick, etc.—all of which may prove a key to the soul; in greater things, by always pointing to the Church as the great mother of all corporal works of mercy. How often do our religious orders by their works of charity lay a foundation whereon the priest can build. Take, for example, the Sisters of Charity and their work in sick-rooms and hospitals. We certainly act according

to the will of Jesus Christ if we take an active interest in the various charitable institutions of the parish and the diocese.

IV. *The Opponents of Christ in His Pastoral Office*

The public ministry of Christ fell upon a turbulent period in history. The times were full of political excitement and violent contrasts. Unbelievers, free-thinkers, sensualists, hypocrites, political and national hotspurs, Greeks, Romans, Jews,—all gathered about our Lord. How sadly must He have looked upon that venerable land, which, under Herod, was profaned with pagan buildings and pagan names! Throngs of enemies watched His every step. Many disagreeable situations were thereby created for Him, as may be seen especially from the Gospel of St. John. In the midst of these excited people Jesus preached on the Kingdom of Heaven.

Similar scenes are reënacted in our day. We are pastors of a Christian people who have received the heritage of the faith from their forebears. But paganism is making terrific inroads everywhere. Thousands of church steeples still point heavenward, but they look down upon a generation torn asunder in matters of religion. The ancient Catholic faith is imperiled by the modern mixture of heresy and paganism which is growing steadily in consequence of the awful evil of mixed marriages. Our school conditions are uncertain, the educational world is full of indications which point to a steadily growing departure from supernatural

belief. A destructive press carries the seeds of intellectual and moral disintegration to the most remote village. There are so many "liberal" views, so many crimes and irregularities, that thousands are turning for relief to radical Socialism and Communism. And the prospects are that this situation, far from improving, will grow worse. Who would gainsay that the pastoration of souls has become much more difficult than it was in the past?

Truly, it is no enviable task to take up the arduous, unpopular fight against the evil passions of men and the frightful aberrations of the age, and it need not surprise us if our pastoral activity shows many failures. But did Jesus Christ fare any better? He was the *"Deus homo, potens in opere et sermone"* (Luke XXIV, 19); and yet, how was His work frustrated by the folly and ill-will of His opponents! Often His Heart was heavy, and He wept. He foresaw that His pastoral activity would end largely in failure. Is it not possible that we, too, are carried along to a like end? At any rate we should keep this possibility in mind. Who knows what will happen when the impending social catastrophe sets in? Yet we may place our trust in Christ, who said: "Fear not!" (Luke XII, 32). We must not give way to pessimism and exclaim: "What is the use?" How much worse would conditions be if we ceased to preach and catechize? Let us not lose courage, but draw renewed strength from the heroism with which our Divine Saviour continued His work in the face of innumerable enemies and difficulties, and let us keep on performing our pastoral duties un-

falteringly. Already we can feel a fresh wave of enthusiasm passing over the Church. Undismayed, our Holy Father bids us renew all things in Christ. *"In hoc signo vinces!"* The cause we serve is the only one that is sustained by a divine promise, and of our enemies a Divine Prophet said nineteen hundred years ago: *"Non praevalebunt"* (Matth. XVI, 18).

Even though we should rescue only a few souls from shipwreck, this would be a glorious gain. For "nothing is equal in value to a single soul," as St. Chrysostom says,[9] and "the loss of one soul is so great that it cannot be expressed in words." But we need not be satisfied with a few. The Catholic priesthood of to-day can garner a rich harvest. As the Saviour saw the world white, ready for the harvest (John IV, 35) —a waving ocean of souls as it were,—so the fields of all climes beckon and invite us. We live in an age in which great things can be achieved for Christ and His Church. Let us, then, follow closely the Author and Finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ (Hebr. XII, 2), by adopting His pastoral principles (God's will and God's honor), employing the means He used in the cure of souls (prayer, preaching, the Sacraments), and following His methods (be men of the people, unceasingly influencing the masses and individuals). At the approach of pessimism let us console ourselves with the apparent failures of Our Lord, be encouraged by His final success, and say to ourselves that we must do our duty as pastors even if we only save our own soul. *"Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti."*

[9] *In I Ep. ad Cor.*, Hom. 3, 5; Montfauc., X, 25.

FOURTH CONFERENCE

THOUGHTS ON PREACHING AND CATECHIZING

PREACHING and catechizing are a part of our daily and weekly task. You have been performing this duty for many years, perhaps for decades, and it is possible that, owing to lapse of time and sad experience, you have begun to find your work irksome and prosaic. Ah, we have looked too deeply into the evils of the time, we have seen too much of the hardness of human hearts, we know too well how small is the flock that adheres to the Saviour and cherishes the *"unum necessarium"* (Luke X, 42)! When we review the actual state of religion at the present time, when we see what is going on everywhere, how defections are constantly increasing,—we are tempted to ask: "What is the use?" In view of the awful distraction and superficiality into which men are drawn by modern ways of self-support and pleasure-seeking, it seems as if the holy name of *Jesus* had lost that mighty power which it formerly exercised over souls, as if the taste for sacred things were vanishing and countless souls were rejecting the supernatural. One might ask: Will our preaching be heard and heeded amid the din of machinery, fast trains, radio, airplanes, etc.? Will our

age, so proud of its inventions and material progress, lend an ear to the ancient stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Job and David, of the Prophets and Apostles? Will our generation, which looks down so haughtily upon metaphysics, listen to a supernatural message?

And yet it is written: *"Verbum Domini manet in aeternum"* (Ps. CXLVIII). As far back as three thousand years ago the word of God appeared to the Psalmist as the one enduring thing in the flight of time. The word of God exerts its influence also in this twentieth century of ours. The future belongs to it, whereas many a modern achievement, which was not planted by the Father, is included in the prophecy: *"Eradicabitur"* (Matth. XV, 13). In the midst of the religious indifference of our time it is necessary that we should cherish a firm conviction of the power, the divinity, and the ultimate victory of our cause, and this sentiment should inspire all our preaching and catechizing.

I. The *office of the preacher* exhibits *divine characteristics* in various respects; and first of all as to its *origin.*

1. Whence does this office originate? That brings us back to the hour of our ordination. When we received the diaconate, the book of the Gospels was handed to us with the command to preach. When we were ordained to the priesthood, we heard from the lips of the bishop the authoritative words: *"Sacerdotem oportet praedicare."* That was the beginning

of our office as preachers. A sacred *fiat* was spoken over us, and we became preachers of the word of God, *"satores aeternitatis,"* [1] sowers on the field of eternity. The Church entrusted to us a mission for which St. Teresa would have given a thousand lives. And the voice of the bishop calling us to this high office was but an echo of a yet mightier voice, addressed to the college of the Apostles, and through it to the whole Church, saying: "As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you." . . . "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations" (John XX, 21; Matth. XXVIII, 19). Here we have the exalted source of preaching. The mission to preach was given to the Son by the Father. Jesus Christ was the Preacher sent by the Father, and His voice being hushed on earth, He relies on our feeble tongue, making it the instrument for accomplishing the greatest and sublimest things. Oh, keep alive in your soul the consciousness of this mission whenever you ascend the pulpit to preach! Say to yourself: "I am a *tuba Dei,* a trumpet of God (Is. LVIII, 1). Nay, more than that, I am a *legatus a latere Iesu.* When I stand in the pulpit, I stand there not in my own name,—nothing could be so paltry as that,—nor in the name of the congregation,—that would be no basis for a Catholic preacher;—nor in the name of the State,—that would not mean much either;—but in the name of the Almighty Creator of Heaven and earth." A feeling of exaltation and holy pride,[2] notwithstanding our sense of personal lowliness, may well animate us when we put

[1] St. Hilary, *In Matth.,* c. 5.

[2] *"Superbia sancta;"* St. Jerome, *Ep. 22 ad Eustoch.,* n. 6.

on the stole. The consciousness that God stands behind us while we speak, lends courage, eloquence, and fearlessness to our preaching. Timidity and embarrassment in preaching arise largely from thinking more of the Ego, which might fail, than of God, *cuius legatione fungimur* (2 Cor. V, 20), who has never yet forsaken anyone that trusted in Him.

As the office of the preacher comes from God, it must be divine also in its effects. If it be a proof of the divine origin of the Church that all the weaknesses and sins of people and clergy combined have not been able to destroy her, then it is also a proof of the indestructible vitality of the preaching office that, notwithstanding so many unsatisfactory and tedious sermons, the pulpit still retains its power of attraction, inducing people to appear again and again to listen to things they have heard a hundred times before. Why is it that hundreds of eyes look up expectantly to the preacher every Sunday as if a new drama were to be enacted? How is it that the mere announcement of an evening sermon suffices to fill the church? This undiminished charm which the word of God exerts upon souls, does not come from us; it comes from the divine character that attaches to the preaching office, and from the blessings that flow from it. We hear of the blessing attached to the preaching of the Apostles and the great missionaries of the Middle Ages. This blessing somehow also accompanies the sermons of the twentieth century. Could we but see what this scattering of seed in the Kingdom of God constantly accomplishes throughout the world, we should be greatly

encouraged. Yes, we should be surprised to see the results of the Sunday sermons in a single parish. For many these sermons are the sole antidote for all the deadly, irreligious germs which they have absorbed from conversation, newspapers, and other sources during the week. Others it furnishes with a strong prop upon which their religious life grows upward. We should be astonished at the importance of the sermon if we could see how things around us would look in a short time if there were no Sunday sermons. The operations of the Holy Ghost are not always manifest, and it is impossible to keep a record of them. Our Lord says they resemble the breath of the Spirit, of whom no one knoweth whence He cometh or whither He goeth (John III, 8). The same is true of our sermons. They are the work of God, and each produces its hidden fruit. How gratifying it was to me when I was a pastor and heard from the mouth of sick persons whom I visited, how well they remembered certain words they had heard from the pulpit decades before. Those words had been to them a lesson for life, a source of comfort and support in the days of their affliction. The priest who had uttered them lay in his grave, but his admonitions still rang out like the sound of a bell. The words spoken in the pulpit are a true *"sermo vivus et efficax"* (Hebr. IV, 12), superior even to a pious book, and not even the worldly-minded hearer can escape the impression that the preacher's message originated in a higher sphere. Let us be convinced that in our preaching office we have something that is far above every other kind of speech-making; all other plat-

forms, the public forum, the halls of legislatures, the university chairs, are purely human, but the pulpit is divine.[3]

2. Now for the application. If the office of preacher is divine, we must treat it accordingly. That is a conclusion the logic of which is inexorable.

(a) In the first place let the preacher conform himself and his innermost being to this divine office. *"Qui sacerdotem dicit, divinum prorsus insinuat virum,"* says St. Ambrose. That is a very high standard, but it is correct. Interior perfection, godliness, is the main requisite of the preacher. We aim to be so many things,—politicians, economists, historians, teachers, estheticians;—very well! But what God primarily requires of us is just this: *that we be holy priests.* That is the first and foremost requirement for properly discharging the office of preacher.[4]

[3] *"Praedicatus divinus"; De Ordinat. Diacon.*

[4] "When you stand in the midst of innocent children, to feed them with the milk of holy truth, and think with dread how soon perhaps these blooming faces will pale under the onset of evil passions; then, when you sit in judgment in God's stead and see the secret depths of human hearts disclosed to you, see all the wretchedness and degeneracy of a nature created to the likeness of God, all the depravity in God's Church, all the abomination of desolation in the very sanctuary; when you see so many Christians amid song and merriment, joking and laughing, dancing in mad recklessness across the stage of life towards the abyss, yet cannot hold them back; when your zeal is inflamed by the scandals all around you, and your heart bleeds at the misery into which multitudes of immortal souls are dragged by sin; . . . oh, then you will appreciate the great value of a

(b) The second conclusion is that we should fill our sermons with divine truths. Preach Jesus Christ, nothing but Jesus Christ! *"Praedicabat illis Iesum Christum,"* the Acts of the Apostles simply reports of the deacon Philip (VIII, 5). The *"illi"* to whom he preached were the semi-pagan Samaritans. So must we preach to all—Christians, pagans, and semi-pagans "the unsearchable riches of Christ," as St. Paul writes to the Ephesians (III, 8). Ah, we have the heathen in our very midst! "There are Indians in Italy," St. Philip Neri used to say to those who wished to go to India to convert the pagans. What would he say now-a-days! The more men withdraw from Jesus Christ, and the harder they try to alienate from Him the hearts of men, especially those of the poor and the working classes, the more earnestly we must preach Him who is the sole salvation of mankind (Acts IV, 12).

Among all the doctrines and convictions fostered at present by Catholics in the domains of religion,

lively faith and a high standard of conduct in the priest, the advantage of even a single degree more of that supernatural strength which can be derived only from the grace of the Holy Ghost, from union with God, from the Heart of Jesus! Your own heart will tell you in such moments: If you were more acceptable to God, if you stood nearer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, if your sins and manifold infidelities did not make you unworthy of a greater fullness of blessing, then so many of your words would not be lost, but your sermons would overcome abuses and put an end to scandals, sinners would not resist your entreaties, you would save many unfortunate souls going to perdition before your very eyes." (Jungmann, *Theorie der geistl. Beredsamkeit,* Vol. I, p. 82.)

politics, sociology, literature, and charity, there is *one* which is fundamental, namely, that Jesus Christ is the only salvation of the human race in general and of every individual human being in particular. *"Quod solus e sinu Patris mundi salus adveneris,"* the Church sings in one of her Christmas hymns. How deeply and securely was this conviction imbedded in the hearts of men during the first centuries of the Christian era, much more deeply and securely than now! One of the choicest fruits of a close study of the Fathers, according to J. A. Möhler, is precisely that we learn here, from the very fountain-head as it were, how these men "thoroughly realized their former misery, because they themselves had been given to the abominations of paganism, and therefore welcomed Christ with exultant joy"; how they "deduced all prayer, meditation, speculation, action from the essence of Christianity"; how "the Saviour of the world was recognized and loved by them as a sure guide and helper." Möhler advised every theologian "to breathe such an atmosphere." "Can it seem unimportant to anyone to transplant this spirit into our time?" he asks.[5] Does not this advice concern every preacher? The most important chapter in homiletics is surely the one which treats of Christ as the beginning, the middle, and the end of every sermon. Christ gives our sermons wonderful substance and fascination. Fénélon said of Demosthenes: "We cannot criticize him because we are carried away by him. We advert only to the things of which he speaks, not to his words; we lose

[5] Möhler-Reitmayr, *Patrologie,* Ratisbon, 1840, I, 4 f.

sight of him and are occupied only with Philip." This is even truer of the preacher who preaches Jesus Christ. We cease to think of him, to criticize him, to be angry with him; we lose sight of him entirely and occupy ourselves solely with Jesus Christ.

In preaching Christ we shall forget to preach *ourselves*. When we preach ourselves, we display before the people our little tricks of oratory, our shallow knowledge, our petty vanity; but when we preach Jesus Christ, then every egotistical tendency is absorbed, and Christ alone dominates, as it should be.

One of the advantages of the *homily* is that it leads us almost imperceptibly to preach Christ. In no other kind of sermon is it possible to bring Our Lord so vividly and concretely before an audience.

We cannot preach Christ unless we study Sacred Scripture, for He is the chief topic of the Old and New Testaments, as St. Augustine says: *"in utroque testamento Christum bibis."* The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are so valuable to the preacher because Christ appears therein as the foundation of the second part, and entirely dominates the second, third, and fourth weeks. As a rule those books of meditation are the most stirring and effective which treat of Jesus Christ, His life, death, passion and glory. If the preacher is accustomed to meditate on these subjects, the fact will be readily apparent from his sermons.

Therefore, preach Christ; and I should like to add: Preach *like* Christ! Preach as He preached! Apply yourself to a thorough study of the Gospels and the

Epistles. There you will find the homiletics of Jesus Christ. There you will see what He thought of the preaching office, how He prepared Himself thirty years for that office, in solitude, recollection, and prayer, how He exercised it for the honor of His Father, with ardent zeal, untiring patience, and heroic perseverance, without egotism, pessimism, or human respect. The Heart of the greatest of all preachers lies open before us in the Gospel. The sermons of Christ also furnish us with an ideal collection of *sermon themes.* Through all His sermons we can trace the fundamental idea of the Kingdom of God, and on this foundation He unfolds an abundance of thoughts: God and the world; the past, present, and future; Heaven and hell, etc., etc. Nothing is small, everything is grand and sublime, and over it all spreads the horizon of eternity. If we were to take up the subjects treated by our Lord in the Gospels, how opportune our sermons would be, and how they would aid us in acquiring a profound grasp of the most modern conditions!

In the Gospels we can study the *homiletic style of Jesus.* What is sterner and nobler, fresher and clearer, than His manner of giving instructions? Let us familiarize ourselves with this classic textbook of homiletics, this inexhaustible storehouse of sermons. *"Haec meditare, in his esto,"* says St. Paul (1 Tim. IV, 15). This requires more than a cursory reading of the Gospels, such as we give to newspapers and magazines or to an ordinary book. The Book of books must be studied with a profound and patient penetra-

tion. We must, as it were, suck from it the divine sap of life. I fear most of us have never learned to read even the Gospels aright.

II. *Catechetics* likewise leads us back to Jesus Christ, who is its Author and Pattern. Like preaching, catechetical instruction is founded on the divine precept, *"Docete omnes gentes."* It has a special model in the singularly beautiful scene of Christ among the little children. The priest, matured by study, steeled by conflicts, enters a gathering of children and speaks to them in their own language of the holiest thing there is. What humility and condescension does this imply, but also what true greatness! Neither classic antiquity nor modern times, in so far as they are not Christian, can show anything like it. I often told my seminarians: If Plato and Aristotle were to return and enter a university lecture room, they would scarcely be astonished, unless it were on account of the little progress made by philosophy since their day; but if they were to enter a Catholic grammar school, they would marvel at the sublime metaphysics propounded to the children and at the way the children answer questions touching the great problems which ancient philosophy sought in vain to solve.

How important is the catechetical instruction of the young! We have the children wholly at our disposal. They are not yet spoiled by false doctrines; they are trustful, devoted, receptive to the teachings by which the Holy Ghost forms their character through

us. We are the first to get hold of these precious souls and can make the deepest impression upon them. All too soon, perhaps, they will fall into the hands of false prophets. Socialism, heresy, unbelief will approach them. But whilst they are still in school, they are ours, and as plastic as wax. How consoling it is to enter a school, filled with divine peace, far removed from vice and mortal sin. These young children know nothing about the dreadful battles and antitheses of life, of scepticism and frivolity, but live in an atmosphere of innocence that is most refreshing to the priest. In parishes that are corrupted the hope of a better future rests entirely with the children. Let us, therefore, always cherish the work of giving catechetical instruction, and perform it as well as we can. It is a most meritorious work before God and often brings down greater blessings than other functions because it offers less opportunity for vanity, being far removed from the sort of publicity which, like the pulpit, promises praise and fame. Yet it is a work of urgent necessity for the interest of the Church, for the preservation of religion among the people,—a work which makes for true culture and good order in Church and State. "The Church gives to the State much more than the State gives to the Church," I once heard a Protestant say in a public assembly. Who knows how much the Catholic Church gives to the State by the unpretentious work of her priests in catechizing the young?

As to the *manner* of giving religious instruction I should like to recommend that, while we try to im-

press the truths of religion deeply, and aim at enabling the children to understand the contents of the catechism, we should not lose sight of that sacred unction which should elevate this work above all others. With profound pleasure I recall certain occasions when all books were laid aside and the catechism class became an hour of holy devotion, in which the children listened with fervor and rapture. Are not such hours altogether too rare in our catechetical instructions? Is it not to be feared that there is too much intellectual and memory work, and too little of the *unctio Spiritus Sancti,* which is the finest fruit of catechetics as it is of homiletics?

In conclusion let us once more visualize Our Divine Saviour in the midst of children. We hear from His divine lips the words: "Suffer the little children to come to Me, and forbid them not" (Mark X, 14). We read in His eyes the great love He harbors for the souls of children. That was *in illo tempore,*—in those days of grace when God walked the earth in human form. But, *"Christus heri et hodie"* (Hebr. XIII, 8). To-day also He says: "Suffer the little children to come to Me, and forbid them not!" Who would forbid children to come to Christ? Ah, thousands of arms are stretched out to snatch them away from Him! There is the modern anti-Christian pedagogy with its denial of original sin and its purely humanistic morality. There is the anti-Christian school policy of to-day, which begins by estranging the teacher from his religion and, if possible, setting him against the pastor.

How a teacher who has become worldly-minded and lost the faith will influence the souls of the children confided to his care may be seen in countries where this infidel school policy has accomplished its purpose more completely than with us. We priests have the sublime vocation to lead the lambs of our flock to Jesus Christ. If that end is attained, the old serpent will not triumph. That is the pith of the "school question," and on this issue the decisive battle must be fought. Let every priest, therefore, stand at his post and do his full duty in catechizing the young! If he performs this duty well, he is doing his share for the propagation of the Kingdom of God, for the welfare of society, for the future of our people. Only in the life beyond will he understand, by the greatness of his reward, what it means to have conducted whole generations of children to the Saviour during a long and blessed priestly career.

FIFTH CONFERENCE

THE HOLY EUCHARIST, THE CENTER OF SACERDOTAL LIFE

I. THIS is a lofty theme. Having the Holy Eucharist for its center, the life of the priest is elevated far above that of the ordinary Christian. The vocation of the layman is enclosed within a small circle, be it in an office or a chancery, a store or a warehouse, a factory or a farm. The center of the priest's life, on the other hand, is Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

1. God Himself has placed us within this wonderful circle by causing us to be ordained to the priesthood. Holy Orders was instituted mainly for the Eucharist, says St. Thomas.[1] Each of the holy orders brought us into a new relation to the Holy Eucharist, and ascending by these regal stairs, we approached closer and closer to the Sacrament of the Altar, until at length the priesthood brought us right into its mysterious center. The principal power of the priesthood is precisely this Sacrament; without the Holy Eucharist we should not be priests. Therefore, God Himself, who gave us the priesthood, has directed us to the Eucharist, and the supernatural process that re-created

[1] *"Ordines ordinantur principaliter ad Eucharistiam"; S. Theol.*, 3a, Suppl., qu. 37, a. 2.

us when we became priests, has an essentially Eucharistic character. Where in all the world of angels and of men is there a being so entwined and united with the Most Holy Sacrament as the priest? And this union is indissoluble. No power in this world or in the next can separate us from the Eucharistic priesthood. By the glorious *"character indelebilis"* God has, as it were, branded our soul forever, and no one can take this Eucharistic stigma from us. Nor does it fade as we grow old, but we shall take it with us through the portals of death into eternity.

Not only ordination, however, but the functions of our priestly office link us forever with the Eucharist. Our ordination to the priesthood was the dawn of a day which is completely filled with the effulgence of the Eucharistic Christ. For years and years, as long as we have been priests, we have always had to deal with the Holy Eucharist. For us there are two sunrises every day,—a natural one and the Eucharistic sunrise in the Mass. And how often does the Blessed Sacrament repose in the priest's hand outside of Mass! How many thousand steps must he take which have the Blessed Sacrament for their aim! It is, indeed, his duty to live wholly within the sanctified sphere of the Eucharist, and he finds himself constantly enveloped in the fragrance of the Sacrament! *"Ecce odor filii mei, sicut odor agri pleni, cui benedixit Dominus"* (Gen. XXVII, 27), as Isaac said when he smelled the fragrance of the field in the garments of his son Jacob. Is not this true in an even higher sense of the priest? The clothes of the pa-

triarch's son exhaled the spicy odor of the Oriental meadows through which he had walked. But when the priest has walked for years through the Eucharistic meadow, where the flower of the field and the lily of the valley bloom (Cantic. II, 1), will not the fragrance of the Sacrament cling to his soul and betray to every man whence he comes and that his home is before the altar of the Lord?

2. We are bound to the Holy Eucharist not only by our ordination and our priestly office, but also by our own *interior needs*. The interior life of the priest necessarily seeks a center, and this again is the Blessed Sacrament.

The priest must first of all *save his soul*. He realizes what the loss of a consecrated soul would mean, —this incomprehensibly gruesome thing, which looms before him often enough and strikes him with terror. Instinctively he looks for a support to which his hope of salvation can cling, for a refuge in which he can take shelter in that dangerous wrestling match with Satan which characterizes the priestly life. A priest who has frequent and intimate intercourse with the Blessed Sacrament gradually becomes imbued with the glorious feeling that he will save his soul.

The priest, moreover, seeks to make progress in *virtue*. This he can best do in union with the Holy Eucharist. As soon as he begins to foster the life of grace, he is spontaneously attracted to a more intimate association with his Eucharistic Lord and soon perceives the sanctifying power that emanates

from the Blessed Sacrament. He sees that in the Eucharist the Saviour constantly gives him an efficient example of all the priestly virtues,—charity, humility, poverty, obedience, chastity,—and of a close union of the active with the contemplative life. As the sun weaves for the earth a garment of leaves and flowers, so the priest receives the garb of virtue from the Eucharistic Sun.

Furthermore, the priest seeks *stability* in the fleetingness of earthly existence. He sees how the tooth of time destroys everything and he yearns for a firm and enduring anchor. That anchor is the Holy Eucharist. Years go by, but He who dwells in the tabernacle remains ever the same. *"Christus heri et hodie, ipse et in saecula"* (Hebr. XIII, 8). The priest also needs *strength and consolation.* Heavy burdens rest upon his shoulders. Now and then he is entrusted with secrets which he would prefer never to have known. Then again the failure of many of his endeavors bows him down. How unproductive is the soil in which he must work! How disconsolate is the outlook upon the world! Often the scandals contained in a single number of a newspaper are enough to dishearten him for the whole day. Then there are depressing interior experiences, temptations, battles, the observation that his own growth in perfection is lamentably slow, and so forth. In view of all these discouragements the priest needs a place where he can lay down his burden. That spot is the Tabernacle. It is like the lovely resting-place of Elim (Exod. XV, 27) in the midst of the desert, where palm trees rear their crown and foun-

tains gush, where the *"Venite ad me omnes, qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos"* (Matth. XI, 28) becomes a sweet reality; where the pressure is lifted and the anxious heart finds surcease of sorrow.

The priest occasionally needs a *rest.* Many a priest is like a hunted roe, seeking the dark of the thicket and the cool of the forest. Tired,—physically, intellectually, morally tired, that is often his complaint. The Blessed Sacrament alone promises him the rest he craves,—a chance to take fresh breath and replenish his exhausted strength.

The priest also needs a true *friend.* Where may he find the ideal friendship for which his heart longs? It does not exist among men. But Jesus in the Holy Eucharist is the Friend of all friends. He alone has soul and heart enough, is beautiful and rich enough, is powerful and kind enough to satisfy, nay more than satisfy, all our demands. Study His relation to Lazarus and see what kind of a friend He is!

In the heart of the priest there dwells another feeling that goes beyond what is called friendship. The human soul, and especially the soul of the priest, craves to be a *bride,* and seeks a bridegroom. What the world calls love, even in the legitimate form of wedlock, the priest has freely sacrificed. It would not satisfy him either. But he cannot dispense with love for the ideal Bridegroom, who as God and man is sovereign beauty in every regard. That yearning which stirs the depths of a priest's soul for this bridal relation with perpetual beauty and purity, is

satisfied by the Holy Eucharist. Here the Son of God holds sway in all His fascinating loveliness; not far away, no, only a few paces from you, willing to abandon Himself to a most intimate union with His chosen souls.

II. You see, therefore, my brethren, what the Eucharist is or may be to us. But let us draw the necessary practical conclusions from these truths. Here, as in all things pertaining to religion, we must apply the logic of the Saints. If the Holy Eucharist is the center of life, then our souls must turn constantly about it. A planet does not swerve from the course marked out for it by the will of God, as the Book of Baruch says: "The stars were called and they said: Here we are, and with cheerfulness they have shined forth to Him" (III, 35). *"Ecce adsumus,"* should be our reply to God's call to the Eucharistic service. The *sacramentum ordinis* has unalterably committed us to the luminous Eucharistic orbit, and we must keep to this course and not deflect from it. A sacerdotal life that does not revolve about the Holy Eucharist is an absurdity and a misfortune, and can only terminate in torpidity and darkness. Alas! how many such extinct stars are drifting about the priestly firmament!

The Priests' Eucharistic League aims to cultivate this beautiful devotion to the Sacrament of the Altar, to make amends for the aberrations of former years, and to preclude further deviations. It is a providential work.

But whether we belong to this League or not, we should all be priests of adoration. Our devotion to the Blessed Sacrament must rise above the devotion of laymen, nay, even above that of chosen souls in convents, as the palm towers above the lowly shrubs. And since we have the privilege of the chalice, it should also turn seriously to the veneration of the *Precious Blood* under the appearance of wine. It should manifest itself by *purity of conscience,* without which the Eucharistic devotion of the priest is self-deception; by *frequent meditation* on the Eucharist as a Sacrifice and a Sacrament; by the devout manner in which we treat the Sacrament in our various functions. In our respect, adoration, and love we should imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary. Ah, how tenderly, with what unutterable delight, with what wonderful love, with what unspeakable charm did the *Mater admirabilis* handle her *Sanctissimum!* Or let us take the Apostles for our model. How instructive is their behavior toward the glorified Saviour after the Resurrection! It shows us what our attitude towards the Eucharist should be,—a holy mixture of reverence and intimacy, guarding against timidity as well as against undue familiarity with the Blessed Sacrament. Our devotion should manifest itself by frequent visits to the tabernacle. The *visitatio Sanctissimi* is an oft-repeated protest on the part of the clergy against the world, which crowds the theatres, club rooms, and dance-halls, but leaves the tabernacle deserted.

And finally, let us frequently proclaim the glories of this Sacrament! *"Quasi tuba exalta vocem"* (Is.

LVIII, 1). In *sermons and catechetical instructions,* in the *confessional,* and in the *sermo pedestris* the priest should be the herald of this Sacrament, and amid the noise of our twentieth-century civilization the Eucharistic *clangor tubarum* should be plainly audible in word and writing. What a glorious calling it is to be an ambassador, a legate, a missionary, an apostle of the Holy Eucharist!

But I must close. I have confined myself to an outline of the priest's relations to the Holy Eucharist. The development of the particulars I will leave to you. This much is certain: the Holy Eucharist must be the life-center of the priesthood. Let us, like St. Bernard, joyfully call to Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament: *"Tu frater, tu soror, tu pater et mater, tu mihi eris omnia."* Hence, *"vere beati, qui hanc sugunt mammillam!"*

SIXTH CONFERENCE

THE LITURGY OF THE ORDINATION RITE [1]

HOLY ORDERS is one of the greatest Sacraments, and the Church has, therefore, surrounded it with a magnificent rite. To understand the full grandeur and importance of this Sacrament we must contemplate it in the mirror of the sacred liturgy, where the innermost thoughts of the Church are disclosed to us.

I. *Introduction (Calling upon the Ordinandi to come forward, Postulatio and Annuntiatio)*

1. The candidates for ordination are called upon to come forward. The word *"accedant"* contains a solemn summons, *in facie ecclesiae,* to the most important event of your whole life. Picture to yourself the election of the Apostles (Luke VI, 12 ff.). On the summit of the mountain overlooking Lake Genesareth, Jesus Christ calls them, each one by name. This call signified for those concerned a momentous predestination, which affected the history of the whole world. What the summons to ordination means to you, what will be its consequences, you cannot now understand. But God knows it; He knows what He

[1] A sketch for an ascetic treatise on the rite of ordination, intended primarily for *ordinandi,* but suitable also for spiritual reading for priests in retreat, or upon the anniversary of ordination, etc.

is doing, what He is risking by calling you to the altar. Before our Blessed Redeemer chose the Apostles, He had prayed the whole night (*"erat pernoctans in oratione";* Luke VI, 12). Previous to that He had labored a long time in order to instruct, educate, perfect, and train His Apostles! How many prayers were offered up for you prior to the call of the *"accedant,"* what efforts, how many sacrifices were made in behalf of your soul, how much toil was consumed in teaching and training you,—and now, at last, the great moment has arrived!

What is your answer to this roll-call? *"Adsum!"* That is not the customary "Present." It implies much more. "I am here," means: "I am ready for the great work for which God has intended me, for all the sacrifices of the priestly life." The Gospel says that when Jesus called the Apostles by name, "they came to Him" (*"venerunt ad eum";* Mark III, 13). With what deep emotion, with what magnanimous sentiments did they approach Him! You, too, should step forward with a willing heart, with Apostolic courage, your soul ornamented with the necessary virtues!

The deacons now surround the altar, carrying on their arms the folded chasuble, which indicates what they are to be. They are awaiting a mysterious genesis, a mystic rebirth full of grandeur and beauty.

2. The *Postulatio.*—*"Postulat sancta mater Ecclesia Catholica."* Longingly the Church looks about for new shepherds, and hence the demand,—for ordination is a matter concerning the whole Church,—

that the bishop elevate the *ordinandi* to the rank of priests. Immediately the Church makes known what it is all about: *"ut hos praesentes diaconos ad onus presbyterii ordinetis."* This is the *sacra moles sacerdotii,* as one of the Church Fathers puts it. A tremendous load lies here; the hands that will impose it are ready; you bow down to take it upon your young shoulders. What a solemn moment!

The question is asked: *"Scis illos dignos esse?"* How harsh this question sounds! The archdeacon's reply is couched in reservations. Where indeed shall we find one to whose previous life may be applied the beautiful words which St. Gregory of Nanzianzus spoke of St. Basil: "He was a priest before he was ordained." Anyhow, the archdeacon gives the assurance that he deems you worthy, and the bishop joyfully answers, *"Deo gratias."*

3. The *Announcement.*—After these preliminaries the bishop turns to the clergy and people (*annuntiat*). In the following passage of the liturgy the Church preserves a precious remembrance of the discipline of that glorious age, when the people were asked for their consent before ordination. The thoughts expressed here are in a measure applicable to-day: *"Quoniam, fratres carissimi, rectori navis et navigio deferendis eadem est vel securitatis ratio vel communis timoris, par eorum debet esse sententia, quorum causa communis existit."* To this day it is of the greatest interest to the people who travel in the ship of the Church, that the officers of this ship, the clergy, be competent and trustworthy.

Even now one or the other among the people could testify regarding the candidate for Holy Orders, because he knows what others do not know (*"quod nonnunquam ignoratur a pluribus, scietur a paucis"*). The people will also be guided more easily by a shepherd in whom they had confidence even before his ordination (*"facilius ei quis obedientiam exhibet ordinato cui assensum praebuit ordinando"*). If this practice were still in vogue, and lay persons were to speak frankly about the candidates for ordination, as the *Pontificale* requires, many a candidate would look about him with anxiety. There is something impressive about this appeal to the people, and it has been purposely retained, even though it is now but a mere formality. The Church shows that the worthiness of the *ordinandi* is regarded by her as a matter of the utmost importance.

II. *The Admonition of the Bishop to the Ordinandi* (*Admonitio*)

The preparation for the rite is now over. The bishop turns to the *ordinandi.* What he tells them in the name of the Church is inspired by a supernatural wisdom and an exalted love. It is enlightening to hear holy Mother Church, who has such a profound understanding of the things of God, such abundant experience in all human affairs, speaking about the priesthood. It is encouraging to look into her maternal heart. First she enumerates in so many words the five great rights or powers of the priesthood: *"Sacer-*

dotem oportet offerre, benedicere, praeesse, praedicare et baptizare." By these five privileges a priest excels the Angels. They arouse dread because of the holy and mysterious powers thus placed into the hands of a weak mortal. Therefore there immediately follows this sentence: *"Cum magno quippe timore ad tantum gradum ascendendum est."* Hence one must bring to the holy priesthood an equipment such as the ordination rite briefly describes in the words: "Heavenly wisdom, moral integrity, mature observance of justice." My God, what riches are here demanded of a beggar! Who is fit for such things? we may ask with the Apostle (cfr. 1 Cor. IV, 2). But the Church inflexibly continues her demands. She points to those great models of the priesthood,—the seventy elders of Israel and the seventy-two disciples of the New Testament. She mentions Moses and the Apostles, whom you are called to assist. *"Tales itaque esse studeatis, ut in adiutorium Moysi et duodecim Apostolorum, Episcoporum videlicet catholicorum, qui per Moysen et Apostolos figurantur, digne per gratiam Dei eligi valeatis."* Behold, you are called to be princes of God's kingdom. How do we feel when we hear the allusion to the Decalogue (*"decalogum legis custodientes"*), to mature learning and honorable conduct (*"probi et maturi in scientia similiter et opere"*), to perfection in faith and deeds (*"fide et opere perfecti"*), to the twofold love of God and neighbor (*"geminae dilectionis, Dei scilicet et proximi, virtute fundati"*)? Does "possessing" mean "ought to possess"? Place on one side the demand of the Church, and on the other the general conduct of your

life, and you will be tempted to entreat the Church to cease enumerating the virtues required in a priest,—it is so painful. But she goes on in her remarkable address and seems to come to no end: *"Servate in moribus vestris castae et .sanctae vitae integritatem";* she demands of her priests that they should know the mysteries they handle and imitate them (*"agnoscite quod agitis, imitamini quod tractatis"*); she requires of them mortification, wisdom, a good reputation, edification of the entire family of God.[2] In conclusion the Church hints at the possibility that the bishop may go to hell on account of this ordination and you with him. What a gloomy shadow unexpectedly passes over the festive scene! Is it her awful experience which has induced the Church to permit the fire of hell to flare up for an instant in the very midst of the beautiful ordination rite? But she sincerely desires that this frightful possibility may not be realized, but that the day of ordination may redound to the reward of the bishop and the *ordinandi.*[3] Having shown the depths of hell, she points to the radiance of Heaven. Thus the conclusion of the address becomes powerfully earnest: eternity stretches out before us with its *aut—aut.* Eternal joy or eternal woe lie before us,—the day of

[2] *"Mortificare membra vestra a vitiis et concupiscentiis omnibus procuretis. Sit doctrina vestra spiritualis medicina populo Dei. Sit odor vitae vestrae delectamentum Ecclesiae Christi, ut praedicatione atque exemplo aedificetis domum, id est familiam Dei."*

[3] *"Quatenus nec nos de vestra provectione nec vos de tanti officii susceptione damnari a Domino, sed remunerari potius mereamur: Quod ipse nobis concedat per gratiam suam."*

ordination may lead us to either goal. What else can the *ordinandus* do but prostrate himself before God and intone the *Kyrie eleison* of the Litany?

III. *The Litany of the Saints*

According to an ancient custom, the Litany of the Saints now follows. This portion of the holy rite, with the *humi prostratio,* never fails to make a deep impression upon all present. Great are the purposes of this Litany, great also are its contents and effects.

1. *Purpose of the Litany.*—The bishop and the *ordinandi* feel that they can do nothing of themselves, but can obtain everything from God through the merits of Jesus Christ. Hence they pray for the divine assistance and ask for the intercession of the Saints upon bended knee, lying in the dust. To everyone who witnesses this touching scene it must be plain that human pride and self-confidence must be banished and only the humble are deemed worthy of entering the sanctuary. In later life you ought often to recall how you once lay prostrate before God to implore His mercy and assistance.

Another purpose of the Litany is to bring before the *ordinandus* a number of holy men, especially priests, whom he should regard as models and by whose fate he can see what awaits him. The Church arrays before him an illustrious galaxy of ancestors, who now enjoy celestial glory, and points to them, saying: "Become like unto them, and you will be rewarded, as they

have been rewarded!" By reciting the Litany of the Saints, the Church wishes not only to humble us, but also to elevate, to strengthen and encourage us. She wants us to be deeply penetrated by humility and courage. In the houses of princes there are spacious halls, where the pictures of ancestors are exhibited. We may imagine with what lofty emotions an impressionable descendant of an ancient house walks about in his ancestral gallery. *Our* ancestral gallery is the Litany of the Saints.

2. The *grandeur and beauty of the Litany.*—The Litany begins with the humble petition *"Kyrie eleison."* This cry for mercy is directed to the holy and indivisible *Trinity.* God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, the *primum esse,* before whom all those lying prostrate here are as nothing,—are implored to show mercy to the *ordinandi.*

The invocations of the Litany unfold to us a glorious panorama of the world of the angels and of the Saints and Blessed in Heaven. It is as if the uncreated Sun of Grace were reflected in a thousand dewdrops and in as many different colors. The first Saint invoked is Mary, the Mother of priests; then comes St. John the Baptist, the morning star of the Messianic dawn; then St. Joseph and the august college of the Apostles,—all Saints who had personal intercourse with Christ on earth; truly sacerdotal men, and hence willing to aid those who, like themselves, are called to the Apostolic office. *"Omnes sancti discipuli Domini,"*—how befitting an invocation on the day

of ordination. Then the multitude of holy Martyrs is called upon in behalf of those who assume the unbloody martyrdom of the priesthood. Next the holy Doctors, the founders of religious Orders, and *"omnes sancti sacerdotes";* the lovely host of virgins and women who shine in glorious effulgence,—all stations, all virtues existing among men, magnificent epochs of the Church's history, heroic deeds,—all this passes before our eyes. All the inhabitants of Heaven are invited to witness our elevation to the priesthood, and they all come because they have a heart for the needs of the Church, a comprehensive appreciation of the importance of the priesthood, knowing so much better than we what it means to be a priest, and recognizing so much more clearly the needs of the time in which we live. Oh, with what confidence may we not send up our *ora pro nobis* to all these dear Saints!

Now comes another part of the Litany, the so-called *"deprecationes."* Turning away from the Saints, the Church again addresses the eternal God Himself. Striking our breast, we cry out: *"Parce, exaudi, libera."* We look at the multitude of evils which threaten us in this valley of tears,—sin, the divine wrath, and lastly, the *malum sine fine,* eternal death, and we cry out: "Deliver us O Lord!" On this very day we see black clouds rising in the distance, the *"insidiae diaboli,"* the *"spiritus fornicationis,"* the *"subitanea mors (clericorum sors),"* and well may we beg God to avert them and adjure Him by all that is holy and dear to Him, to save us—through His coming, through His birth, through His Passion and death,

through his Resurrection and Ascension. One more petition closes this soul-stirring array: *"In die iudicii, libera nos, Domine!"* Thus on the day of ordination the trumpet of the Last Judgment resounds in our ears. *"In die iudicii,"*—what an admonition to one who is about to be ordained!

This is followed by the *"supplicationes."* Positive petitions are now sent up to the throne of God. *"Ut nobis indulgeas,"*—how much consideration must God show us, especially at the threshold of the Sacrament of Holy Orders! And what sweeping, truly Catholic petitions these are! First, our thoughts are directed towards God's Kingdom on earth, the Church, the Pope, the bishops, the clergy, the religious orders, the enemies of the Church, the secular rulers, and all Christian peoples. What can be nearer to us, on the day of ordination, than the Church, God's Kingdom on earth? Then we think of ourselves: *"Ut nos in sancto servitio confortare et conservare digneris."* The priesthood is the special *servitium Dei* for which supernatural strength and endurance are most necessary. *"Ut mentes nostras ad caelestia desideria erigas,"*—whom does this request befit more properly than an ecclesiastic whose watchword should ever be: *"Sursum corda"?* Your brothers, relations, and benefactors are mentioned in another petition. Lastly, the Litany makes a touching appeal for the poor souls. They should not go empty to-day, and least of all in the future life of the newly ordained priest. The poor souls expect a great deal of you.

Now come the three solemn petitions and signs of the

cross made by the bishop holding the crosier, which you have long known, but which have a deeper and fuller meaning for you on this day. Last of all the simple yet grand petition to Jesus Christ: *"Fili Dei, te rogamus, audi nos."* We call on the Son of God, the eternal High Priest, who is so deeply concerned about a worthy priesthood.

During these and the following petitions: *"Agnus Dei . . ."* your confidence may rise as high as Heaven. The fervent *"Christe, audi nos,"* like the last note of a majestic peal, ends the Litany. We hope that the purpose for which the Church offered this supplication will be fully attained.

3. Let us consider the effects of this Litany. We may place reliance upon it, for it is the Church, the beloved Spouse of Christ, the Queen of humanity, the Mother of all the faithful, who prays. How imploring are her entreaties, how penetrating is that oft-repeated *"Ora pro nobis, libera nos, te rogamus, audi nos!"* How pathetic in the sight of God and His heavenly court is the kneeling down and the *humi prostratio* of persons in the state of grace! How this act of adoration and self-humiliation must move God to grant their prayers! And think of the many Saints, those *multiplicati intercessores!* When all Heaven prays with us, can God resist our petition? A copious rain of grace falls down from Heaven during this Litany. A cloud detaches itself from the throne of God and descends upon our souls. *"Ascendit pre-*

catio et descendit Dei miseratio," [4] and each of the celestial princes who pass before our vision in the petitions of the Litany, drops a precious gift into our outstretched hand. When the last *"Kyrie eleison"* has died away, you may arise joyful and consoled.

IV. *The Imposition of Hands by the Bishop, the Succeeding Prayers, and the Preface*

We are nearing the climax of the ordination rite,—the imposition of hands by the bishop, the act whereby the Sacrament is administered. The resonant chant of the Litany is followed by a deep silence. In the midst of this abrupt calm the bishop lays his hands on the *ordinandi,* and the grace of the Sacrament descends mysteriously and softly like the dew at night.

The rubric says: *"Post haec* [*i. e.,* the Litany] *surgunt omnes."* This symbolizes the ascent from lowliness to greatness. The greatest moment of your life is now at hand. *"Suscitans a terra inopem, et de stercore erigens pauperem, ut collocet eum cum principibus"* (Ps. CXII, 7, 8). Two by two the *ordinandi* step up to the bishop. The laying-on of hands is of Apostolic origin; it is met with in the Orient as well as the Occident, and from this particular ceremony the whole Sacrament is often called Χειροτονία, *i. e.,* laying on of hands. This and the prayer which the bishop says may be regarded as the essential matter and form of the Sacrament, though older theologians saw the matter

[4] Pseudo-Augustine, S. 47, *al. De Temp.,* 226, 1; Migne 38, 1838.

and form in the delivery of the sacred vessels and the words accompanying that ceremony. In practice both must always be observed.[5]

1. Now comes the *imposition of hands* (Χειροτονία). The bishop silently (*"nihil dicens,"*) lays his consecrated hands upon your head, not only one hand, as at deaconship, but both hands; after him all the priests present do the same, as a token of the solidarity of the hierarchy. Now the bishop returns to the altar and stretches out his right hand over the *ordinandi.* The same is done by all the priests. I have seen as many as thirty priests extend their hands with the bishop; it was a solemn and thrilling ceremony.

What is the meaning of this imposition of hands?

(a) It signifies the *imparting of grace.*[6] Open the eyes of faith and see what Divine Omnipotence, Wisdom, and Love are working in your soul. It is a new creation, full of spiritual splendor. See how by this laying on of hands the sacramental grace is bestowed, the *"character indelebilis"* is impressed upon your soul, your life is henceforth placed under the aegis of a mighty Sacrament,—the Sacrament of the priesthood! O blessed moment, which produces such effects and is followed by a veritable downpour of graces!

[5] See Schanz, *Lehre von den heiligen Sakramenten,* § 51, Freiburg, 1893; Gasparri, *Tract. de S. Ordinatione,* Vol. II, n. 1080 ff., Paris, 1894; Gihr, *Die heiligen Sakramente,* Vol. II, 418 ff., Freiburg, 1899; Pohle-Preuss, *The Sacraments,* Vol. IV, pp. 62 ff.

[6] *"Ad significandum copiosum gratiae effectum";* St. Thomas.

The laying on of hands also signifies the *taking possession* of your person by God and the Church. An almighty hand is laid upon you and claims you. From now on you irrevocably belong to God, and to no one else. The rite further signifies protection from above. The Almighty knows how to protect His property, and He has said: *"Nolite tangere christos meos"* (Ps. CIV, 15). Woe to him who touches His anointed ministers! *"Quoniam dextera sua teget eos et brachio sancto suo defendet illos"* (Wisd. V, 17).

2. Hear the consoling prayer of the bishop: *"Oremus, fratres carissimi, Deum Patrem omnipotentem."* He appeals to the omnipotent God to pour out an abundance of heavenly gifts upon these young Levites, *"ut super hos famulos tuos, quos ad presbyterii munus elegit, caelestia dona multiplicet."* When we shall one day review our whole earthly life in eternity, in what splendor will this moment beam upon us, when God reached down into the depths of His treasures to shower upon us a superabundance of graces! God Himself, as the prayer says, has chosen these young men to be His priests, and gives them god-like gifts to enable them to administer their sublime office, *"ut quod eius dignatione suscipiunt, ipsius consequantur auxilio."* If, as the moment of ordination draws nearer, you become more and more oppressed by the thought of your poverty and weakness, this passage of the sacred rite will supply you with inexhaustible solace. And later on in life, in times of gloom and discouragement, this passage will bring a ray of light into your

priestly career and be a source of comfort to you till the last day of your sojourn on earth.

Now is intoned the solemn summons to pray: *"Oremus, flectamus genua,"* etc., followed by prayers which are taken almost literally from the oldest Sacramentaries and *Pontificalia* known to us. How often has the Lord been besought in this *consecratio,*—as these prayers were once called,—and how often have they brought down torrents of grace upon newly ordained priests! The first oration (*"Exaudi"*) is a request, on behalf of the *ordinandi,* for the graces required by them, for the "blessing of the Holy Ghost," for the "power of sacerdotal grace." Then the prayer rises to the solemn form of the *Preface.* The bishop first of all gives thanks to God, the Giver of the high priesthood as well as of the priesthool of the second rank,[7] and reverts to the distant desert, to the priesthood of the Old Testament, upon which God poured out the fullness of His paternal love.[8] Then he recalls how the priests of the New Testament, endowed with a like fullness of grace, were constituted helpers of the Apostles (*"Hac providentia, Domine, Apostolis Filii tui doctores fidei comites addidisti"*) and gives them a splendid

[7] *"Vere dignum et iustum est, acquum et salutare, nos tibi semper et ubique gratias agere, Domine sancte, Pater omnipotens, aeterne Deus, honorum auctor et distributor omnium dignitatum, . . . ut cum Pontifices summos regendis populis praefecisses ad eorum societatis et operis adiumentum, sequentis ordinis viros et secundae dignitatis eligeres."*

[8] *"Sic in eremo per septuaginta virorum prudentium mentes Moysi spiritum propagasti. . . . Sic et in Eleazarum et Ithamarum filios Aaron paternae plenitudinis abundantiam transfudisti."*

testimonial (*"quibus illi orbem totum secundis* [happy] *praedicationibus impleverunt"*). The bishop then regards himself and the band of *ordinandi,* who are to be his co-workers.[9] He asks a great and sublime privilege for these new laborers in the vineyard: *"presbyterii dignitatem,"* and begs God: *"Innova in visceribus eorum Spiritum sanctitatis,"*—give them the Spirit of holiness, so that they may pass judgment upon morals by the example of their conduct (*"censuram morum exemplo suae conversationis insinuent"*). Note the exalted opinion of the Church regarding the significance of priestly conduct! They should be models of virtue, a mirror of good morals to the good, and a living reproach to the wicked. Vice and immorality should be put to shame and chastised by the mere sight of the Catholic priest and his conduct. How much personal sanctity, what circumspection in behavior, does not this *censura morum* assume in the priest! Hence it is a weighty reason which prompts the bishop to express the wish that every form of righteousness may shine forth in them (*"eluceat in eis totius forma iustitiae"*).

At the end of the Preface the bishop looks forward to the hour of final reckoning. The Church, your loving Mother, wishes that you may render a good account of yourself. *"Utinam!"* Behold the *"aeternae beatitudinis praemia,"* the eternal reward of beatitude that awaits you![10] Thus the Preface soars

[9] *"Quapropter infirmitati quoque nostrae, Domine, quaesumus, haec adiumenta largire, qui quanto fragiliores sumus, tanto his pluribus indigemus."*

[10] *"Ut bonam rationem dispensationis sibi creditae reddituri aeternae beatitudinis praemia consequantur."*

eagle-like to the very throne of God. In the first address the Church spoke *to you* and told you what she expected of you as a priest; in the Preface she speaks *to God* and entreats Him to give you what you need. Oh, join your supplication with that of the Church; let the lofty spirit of the Preface inspire you with holy confidence and joyful courage, so that God will give you whatever you stand in need of, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord, His Son. . . .

V. *The Investiture of the Ordinandi*

Repeatedly you have knelt before the altar to receive the insignia of the several orders. You now step forward for the last and highest investiture, to be solemnly clothed with the insignia of the priesthood of the New Testament. We read in the Pentateuch (Exod. XXIX) that God prescribed to Moses how to clothe Aaron and his sons in priestly garments when he consecrated them to the priesthood. Also in the first centuries of Christianity we meet with a presentation of ecclesiastical vestments. Gregory the Great mentions the chasuble, and the rite of conferring the stole at ordination is more than a thousand years old. An eloquent and charming symbolism underlies this investiture, and you ought to enter devoutly into the thoughts laid before you by the Church in performing these acts.

1. First the *stole* is laid upon you. You already received it as deacon: now it is completely imposed

upon you to show that the fullness of spiritual power [11] is bestowed upon you. The two parts of the stole are placed cross-wise over your breast, to signify [12] that, as a priest, you should be filled with power from on high, to carry the Cross of Christ yourself, and by word of mouth and by example to teach others how to bear it. How significant is this solemn investiture with the cross *in facie Ecclesiae* on the day of ordination! Is it not a symbolic prophecy of your dedication to the *via crucis* of the priesthood? It always reminds me of the second station of the Way of the Cross: "Jesus takes the Cross upon His Shoulders." The Church signs you with the cross; thus you will sign yourself with the stole in the form of a cross every morning before Mass. Let that be a suitable indication of your readiness to bear the Cross of Christ daily in all the numerous forms in which it weighs upon the priest!

Weigh also the *words* which the bishop speaks to you when he gives you the stole: *"Accipe iugum Domini."—"Iugum";* yes, do not deceive yourself, it is a yoke that you assume. The future will teach you that. The greatest and wisest priests have ever called it so. The Church herself terms it a yoke on the day of ordination. A yoke is something that binds and presses. Your neck must bow beneath the yoke. Experience will teach you what all this means. You will find a mysterious compulsion lying upon you and holding you down. Hence the word *"accipe,"* with

[11] *"Plena potestas dispensandi sacramenta";* St. Thomas Aqu.
[12] *Cat. Rom.*, P. II, c. VII, qu. 24.

which the yoke is laid upon you, is very serious, being fraught with dark and bitter meaning.

But suddenly a gladsome light flashes upon this gloom in the words that follow: *"Accipe iugum Domini."* The yoke you accept is the yoke of the Lord. It is not the yoke of the world, which galls, nor the yoke of a secular vocation, which presses upon your head; no, it is the yoke of the special service of the God of all consolation (2 Cor. I, 3), a yoke of which the Saviour Himself spoke most encouragingly. His words are repeated to-day by the Church in a special sense: *"Iugum meum suave est et onus meum leve"* (Matth. XI, 30). It is a sweet yoke, a light burden. Observe the truly consoling turn in these words of the ordination rite: "Accept the yoke of the Lord; *for* His yoke is *sweet*." *Because* His yoke is sweet, therefore take it upon you.[13] Oh, how good God is to us, how kind and gentle the Church! The priesthood with its manifold duties and responsibilities is a yoke indeed; but the grace of God lightens it so that an exuberant joyfulness is a peculiar characteristic of the Catholic priest. *"Superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione,"* says St. Paul (2 Cor. VII, 4).

2. At ordination the Church makes us put on another garment, the *chasuble*, which is the distinctive vestment of the priest. *"Accipe vestem sacerdotalem,"* says the bishop. Oh, how many years have you waited for

[13] *"Suscipite iugum Christi. Nolite timere, quia iugum est; festinate, quia leve est. Non conterit colla, sed honestat."* (St. Ambrose, *De Elia et Ieiun.*, c. 22; Migne, 13, 763.)

this blessed invitation! Now at length the Church hands you the priestly garment and bids you put it on. From now on it is yours! To-day for the first time this garment of honor flows from your shoulders, and it says to you: *"Tu es sacerdos,"* and everyone who sees you says: "That man is a priest." Every day this garment shall adorn you in a most holy hour, and when you are dead and your body is placed in the coffin, that dress shall remain with you and descend with you into the grave.

But see how this holy vesture shines in the light of this lovely day of your ordination! Hear the symbolism of surpassing beauty unfolded by the Church at this ceremony! She tells you that this vestment signifies charity (*"per quam caritas intellegitur"*). What kind of charity is this? It is the love of God and of your neighbor,—a truly sacerdotal, ardent love for Christ and His Church, for your fellow-priests, for the souls of those entrusted to your care, for all mankind. As the chasuble covers all the other articles of apparel, so the priest's love should drape, protect, and adorn all virtues. His life should be vested and embellished with love. *"Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocunque feror"* (St. Augustine).[14] Take up, then, O Priest, the sacred pursuit indicated by the chasuble, and be happy therein; let sacerdotal love be the bliss of thy heart and a foretaste of Heaven! It is a love which daily finds

[14] Confess., XIII, 9. *Idem: "Corpus pondere suo nititur ad locum suum. Ignis ursum tendit, deorsum lapis. Pondus meum amor meus; eo feror, quocunque feror. Dono accendimur et sursum ferimur. Inardescimus et imus."* (*Ibid.*)

new nourishment in God. "God is charity," says Holy Scripture (1 John, IV, 16), and out of His immeasurable fullness He can give you always more love: *"potens est Deus, ut augeat tibi caritatem et opus perfectum."* To all this you answer: *"Deo gratias!"* What other reply could be made to what you have heard?

3. While the *ordinandi* are still on bended knees, the bishop recites the prayer: *"Deus, sanctificationum omnium auctor,"* etc., and blesses them in the name of the Most High, that they may become true priests, mature men full of virtue, *"ut gravitate actuum et censura vivendi probent se seniores."* In this prayer the most pregnant thoughts crowd one another like pearls on a string. It inculcates the study of the Letters of the Apostles (*"instituti disciplinis, quas Tito et Timotheo Paulus exposuit"*), constant meditation (*"ut in lege tua die ac nocte meditantes"*), instruction of others, harmony of teaching and practice (*"quod legerint credant, quod crediderint doceant, quod docuerint imitentur"*), a whole series of virtues (*"iustitiam, constantiam, misericordiam, fortitudinem, ceterasque virtutes ostendant, exemplo praebeant," etc.*) and refers to the celebration of the sacred mysteries (*"panem et vinum in Corpus et sanguinem Filii tui immaculata benedictione transforment"*), to the attainment of Christ's plenitude of years and the ultimate joyful resurrection (*"inviolabili caritate in virum perfectum, in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi, in die iusti et aeterni iudicii Dei, conscientia pura, fide vera, Spiritu sancto pleni resurgant"*). Such are the contents of

this ancient prayer, which encompasses the whole life of the priest in time and eternity. It is a glorious echo of the pastoral letters of St. Paul. You are fortunate in being the object of such prayers and supplications on the part of the Church. Study deeply the words of this prayer, and you will realize why the stole and the chasuble were conferred upon you.

VI. *Anointment of the Hands and Delivery of the Chalice and Paten*

1. Let us recall to mind the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood of the Old Testament. After they were clothed with the sacred vestments, their *hands were anointed* (Exod. XXIX, 7). This anointment occurs also in the rite of ordination to the priesthood of the New Testament; it is in fact, a most important constituent thereof. Pope Innocent III calls it a divine ordinance and an Apostolic custom, and the Council of Trent lays particular stress upon this ceremony.

Kneeling, the bishop intones with a loud voice the hymn, *"Veni Creator Spiritus."* This magnificent song in honor of the Holy Spirit, from whom true life, the fire of love, and the stream of graces emanate, is in its proper place here at the anointment of the *ordinandi.* For it is the Holy Ghost who sanctifies and anoints, it is He who descends into the hearts of those who are about to become successors of the Apostles; the hearts which He has created He must fill with grace and anoint with divine strength.

The holy oil (oil of the catechumens) typifies sancti-

fying grace, which is infused into the soul of the newly ordained priest and enables him to perform his duties properly (*"fortiter et suaviter"*). Both thumbs and forefingers are anointed because they are destined to touch the sacred Host and distribute it to the faithful. If every chalice and paten is anointed, then all the more should the priest's fingers be anointed.[16] They are anointed in the form of a cross because all graces, including the priesthood, come to us through the cross. The sign of the cross has always been employed at ordination, as SS. Chrysostom and Augustine testify.

The human hand is a most admirably devised instrument of the soul. What a remarkable change! Your hands, which, alas, were employed in so many sins, those hands of flesh destined to rot away after death, are consecrated before God and His heavenly court, amid the tones of the *"Veni Creator."* Always keep this fact in mind and often gaze upon your hands in pious reflection whilst recalling the sacred rite of ordination! Never, never may the verse you will in future recite during Mass apply to yourself: *"in quorum manibus iniquitates sunt"!* Never may those hands with which you touch the Word of Life, be defiled by mortal sin or employed in things unbecoming the dignity of a priest!

Hear the result of the consecration of your hands! "All things whatsoever they bless shall be blessed, and whatsoever they consecrate shall be consecrated and

[16] *"Unctione ad aliquid sacramentum tractandum consecrantur, et ideo unctio solis sacerdotibus fit, qui propriis manibus corpus Christi tangunt."* (St. Thomas, *S. Th.*, 3a, Suppl., qu. 37, a. 5).

sanctified." These hands of yours shall be employed in benediction. What a stream of blessings will issue from them! How many times will they be raised to bless the people; how many knees will bend, how many heads will bow to receive your blessing! How often will these hands be laid on and folded for blessing at the baptismal font, in the confessional, at the sick-bed! Ah, eternity alone can reveal the streams of blessing that flow over the world from the consecrated hands of the priest!

You are now indeed anointed. Christ the Lord is *"the Anointed One,"* whose very name suggests celestial fragrance, anointment with the Holy Ghost. The priest is an *alter Christus,* anointed with the power of the Holy Ghost, and he should fill the Church with the fragrance of his spirit and life.

How solemn is the moment when your hands are anointed! Approach it with a heart full of joy and faith. May the heavenly odor of this blessed hour season your entire sacerdotal life!

2. Now comes a new, momentous rite. The *chalice* and the *paten* are brought and the *ordinandi* touch the chalice and paten with their freshly anointed fingers while the bishop pronounces the words: *"Accipe potestatem offerre sacrificium Dei Missasque celebrare tam pro vivis quam pro defunctis."* The chalice is not empty, as at subdeaconship, but filled with wine; upon the paten lies the host. Even if the significance of these words be only declarative, pointing to the power of sacrificing as already received,—St. Thomas (*l. c.*)

and the Roman Catechism [17] teach that they actually bestow that power and at the same time imprint the *character indelebilis,*—they certainly signify a sacred function of the greatest importance. They announce to you that you have reached the goal of your desire and that the holy Sacrifice may now begin. Chalice and paten will henceforth accompany you through life and repose in your hands whenever the sun ushers in a new day. A wonderfully rich participation in the Holy Eucharist will be your portion and, as a priest according to the order of Melchisedech, you are to be a mediator of grace and blessing for the entire world and for the souls in Purgatory. A glorious career, one that is enveloped in the splendor of the Sacrament of the Altar, lies before you, and these words open to you the golden portals thereof. "O Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and Thou hast set him over the works of Thy hands!" (Ps. VIII, 5 ff.)

VII. *The Offering of the Candle; Con-Celebration with the Bishop; Communion; Conferring of the Power to Loose and Bind; The Last Blessing*

1. When the *ordinandus* offers his lighted *candle* to the bishop, the flame proclaims, as it were, that he is a light of the world, crying aloud, *"Lucere scientia, ardere caritate,"* that is, Be consumed in the service of God. The act of kissing the ring typifies love for the Church. For the last time the *ordinandi* form a beautiful procession with lighted candles, which slowly makes

[17] P. II, c. 7, qu. 10.

its way to the altar. One after another the lights are extinguished, but that for which they stand shall remain for ever!

2. Then begins the celebration of Mass by the newly ordained priests together with the bishop. The power just conferred, of doing what the Saviour did at the Last Supper, is now exercised by you for the first time. It is your first Offertory, your first Consecration, your first Mass.[18] Each one here offers the sacrifice with the bishop. The young priest has now entered upon the wondrous circle of the eternal priesthood, in whose center stands Christ, and whose periphery extends farther and farther as time goes on. Behold the band of youths, just now adorned with the priestly character, bearers of exalted powers, pronouncing the words of the Offertory, the *Sanctus,* the Consecration, and the *Pater Noster* in a holy chorus! What a spectacle for angels and men!

Then comes the kiss of peace and *Communion.* In this Communion the Saviour shares His priestly Heart with His newly made priests. It is a Communion which surpasses in importance all the Communions of your past life. The Saviour is more to you than He has ever been before.

3. This you are told in the magnificent *Responsorium*

[18] Regarding con-celebration, see Thalhofer, *Liturgik,* Freiburg, 1880, II, 318 f. On the other hand, the newly ordained priest, when celebrating his First Mass, offers the Holy Sacrifice independently, goes through the ceremonies himself, and receives Holy Communion *sub utraque specie.*

which is now chanted: *"Iam non dicam vos servos, sed amicos meos."* You are no longer servants, but friends of Christ,—this solemn assurance you receive at the altar from the bishop in Christ's name. And a new chord mingles with the heavenly music of this responsorium: *"Accipite Spiritum Sanctum in vobis Paraclitum. Ille est quem Pater mittet vobis. Alleluia."* These words indicate a new gift, which, on this extraordinary day comes forth from the inexhaustible bosom of Divine Love:—the imparting of the Holy Ghost with the power of forgiving sins.

But a condition must precede this consummation. The bishop and the people want to be sure of the faith of the *ordinandi,* for the Holy Ghost does not enter an unbelieving or heretical soul. Hence the loud, solemn, unanimous profession of faith is now made in the words of the Apostles' Creed. How befitting in this connection is the *Apostles' Creed!* In the responsorium the newly ordained were addressed in words which the Saviour once spoke to the Apostles. Then followed the *"Accipite Spiritum Sanctum,"* which He spoke to the Apostles when He conferred on them the power of binding and loosing (John XX, 23). How suitable, then, that the profession of faith should be made in that form which tradition ascribes to the Apostles! Moreover, you profess before the bishop, who is a successor of the Apostles, that these Apostolic teachings are the norm to which you intend to adhere in the exercise of your office as preachers. *"Profiteantur fidem, quam praedicaturi sunt."* How full of comfort in these disrupted times is the recitation of this

century-old Creed, this magnificent compendium of God's revelations and the faith of His Church!

After the *"vitam aeternam"* of the Creed has died away, the bishop for the last time imposes his hands, pronouncing the words: *"Accipe Spiritum Sanctum, quorum remiseris peccata, remittuntur eis,"* etc., whereby the power of binding and loosing is conferred. Now you are a priest in the fullest sense, and the folded chasuble is let down. The power over the real body of Christ and over His mystic body is forever inherent in your soul. You stand before Heaven and earth clothed in the full dignity and power of the priesthood. *"Stola innocentiae induat te Dominus,"* says the Church in letting down the chasuble. Yes, may God give to you and preserve in you, O Youthful Confessor, the garb of innocence, so that the devil, having been driven from the heart of the penitent and seeking revenge, may not attempt to enter the heart of the confessor and pollute the limpid water whilst it cleanses! Hence the piercing cry: *"Stola innocentiae,"* accompanied by the wish: *"Induat te Dominus"!* For if God does not help you, you are lost!

This act of elevation is immediately followed by an act of humility. You kneel down and promise the bishop reverence and obedience.[19] You know how necessary this submission is and perceive how solemn is the occasion and how significant the ceremony attending your promise. The newly ordained priests place their hands between those of the bishop to indicate that, as

[19] *"Promittis mihi et successoribus meis reverentiam et obedientiam? Promitto."*

their hands are entwined with his, so also their hearts will be united with his. One is thereby reminded of the beautiful words of the holy martyr Ignatius, that the faithful and their priests should be bound to the bishop as the strings are fastened to a zither.[20] What a difference there is between a military or civil induction into office and this ecclesiastical ceremony, which is marked by so much gentleness and amiability!

Finally the bishop gives you the *kiss of peace,* by which he wishes to assure you of his benevolence and to testify that he will exercise his authority over you as a friend and brother. May peace accompany you throughout your priestly life!

The exalted rite is drawing to a close. The bishop admonishes the newly ordained priests to familiarize themselves with the sacred rite of the Mass and then completes the ordination ceremony by imparting the solemn benediction.[21] Before the young levites go forth, the bishop blesses them, as our Saviour blessed His Apostles when He departed from this world. It is a beautiful ceremony, signifying that the blessing of God shall accompany the priest in all the ways which he must walk in seeking souls, be it among thorns or in flames, or, as when the lost drachma must be sought, in dirt and refuse. Under the protection of this bless-

[20] *Ep. ad Ephes.,* c. 4.

[21] *"Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti descendat super vos, ut sitis benedicti in ordine sacerdotali et offeratis placabiles Hostias pro peccatis atque offensionibus populi omnipotenti Deo, cui est honor et gloria per omnia saecula sacculorum. Amen."*

ing he is to arrive safely at the gate of eternity.

Seemingly reluctant to dismiss his sons, the bishop addresses to them a final exhortation before the last Gospel: *"Filii dilectissimi, diligenter considerate ordinem per vos susceptum,"* gives them three Masses to say, and commends himself to their prayers. Then he lets them go.

Let us never allow the sublime strains of the sacred rite of ordination to be drowned by the noise of the world! In later life, when the experience of many days would fain make us hard and cold, let us often recall the genesis of our priesthood, and revolve in spirit the words and ceremonies by which, in the beautiful days of our youth, we were ordained priests of the Most High forevermore.

"O extraordinary miracle, O unspeakable power, O awful mystery of the priesthood! Spiritual and sacred, exalted and blameless office, which Christ after His coming entrusts to us unworthy men! Prostrate I beg with tears and sobs that we may realize what a treasure the priesthood is to those who preserve it worthily and holily. It is a shining and incomparable shield, an unshakable tower, an indestructible wall. It is a firmly built structure, reaching from earth to Heaven. Nay, what do I say, brethren? It reaches to the highest dome. It penetrates without hindrance the Heaven of heavens, it mingles gloriously and easily with the disembodied souls in the midst of the angels. What say I: In the midst of the powers on high? It intimately associates with the Lord of the angels Him-

self, with the Creator and Giver of light, and approaches Him at will with unrestricted confidence. . . . Blessed be the Redeemer, who has presented to the earth this resplendent and purifying gift, and who illumines His priests by His grace, so that they shine like lights in the world! Glory be to the Only-Begotten, glory to the Only Good, who by a new sacred convenant has bestowed upon His disciples the power of manifesting to us the administration thereof by laying their hands upon such as are worthy!" [22]

[22] St. Ephrem, *On the Priesthood,* c. I, 4, 6.

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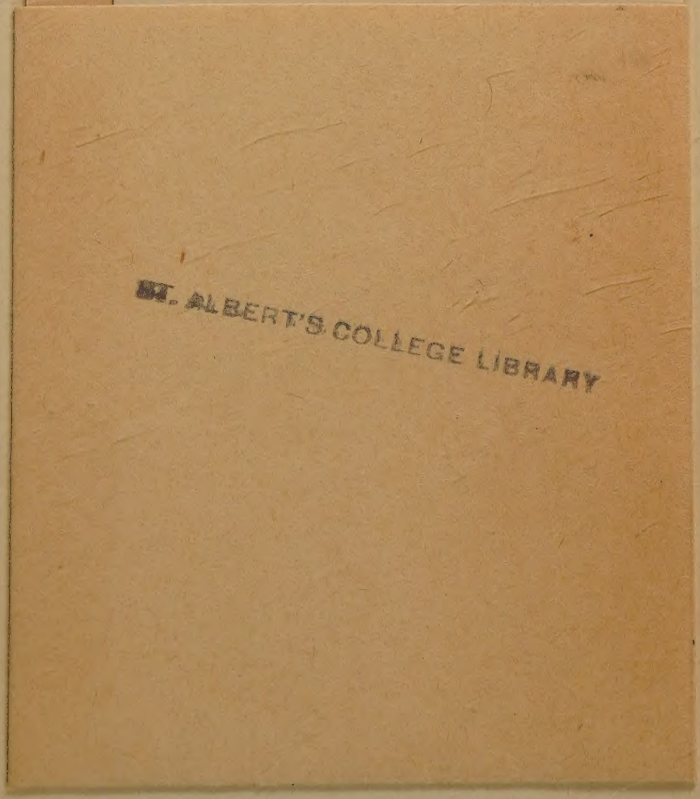

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